A TORY LORDLING.

BY

"BLINKHOOLIE."

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BLINKHOOLIE,

AUTHOR OF "BLAIR ATHOL," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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Dedicated

TO

LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL.

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A TORY LORDLING.

CHAPTER I.

A generous friendship no cold medium knows,
Burns with one love.

Pope.

It is a lovely summer's day, and the grand old trees in Bolingbroke Park are marvellously verdant with their wealth of foliage. The grass springing in rich abundance from the fertile soil, affords knee-deep pasturage, not, as one might expect, to deer, but to some score of thoroughbred mares whose foals embody the future hopes of an old breed on the turf. Thoughtless youngsters as yet, unthinking, as they stand idly by their dams or meet one another in amiable

groups, of the day when for them, too, the starter will drop his flag, and the struggle, under crack of whip and stroke of spur, may result, perhaps, in glorious victory.

Not by mares and foals, however, is the park solely tenanted, for the cattle, to be seen in no small numbers, give evidence enough of a fancy for short-horns. Just glimpsing through the trees, far away in the park, the castle makes itself in some sort visible, and where we are now presumed to be the grass has been mown and rolled for the behoof of cricketers, some of which species are at present disporting themselves thereon. Not a hundred yards away the ground rises abruptly, and the slope of the hill-side is amply supplied with a rare old covert, some quarter of a mile in length, at the end of which comes a vigorous growth of young larches, ending abruptly with a flight of posts and rails,

but joined, at the top corner, by another old wood which stretches away out of sight over the hill.

The cricketers are only boys, with coats and waistcoats off, but otherwise clad in ordinary attire. They are to be noticed nevertheless. See that handsome lad, about fourteen years old, dark, well made, in every way promising so far as appearance goes, except for a suspicion of weakness about the chin and an eye hardly too honest. Well, he is the Marquis of Bolingbroke, eldest son of the Duke of Countryholm, the lord of the estate which flanks us on every side. That other, of say, twelve or thereabouts, who has just missed an easy catch, and is laughing at the cries of "butter-fingers!" is less handsome, but with a frank sunny expression on a thoroughly English face; a fine, strong boy, with curly brown hair; this is Lord

Henry Gainsborough, younger son of the above-named duke. The lad now bowling seems also full of promise. He is John Wilkinson, son of one of the oldest tenants on the estate, and there, standing "point" is his twin-brother Charles. Very like one another they are, and between them and the scions of the landlord's house the most natural good-fellowship seems to prevail. The rest of the field is made up of boys from the adjacent village of Bolton, and two or three friends at present on a visit at the castle. Now, this is a strange sight, for we may be told there is something incongruous, not to say ill-bred, in the idea of such a scratch crew of lordly and plebeian cricketers. Nevertheless, such as it is, we present it to the reader in the hope that it may at some time during this story assume a more honourable significance than it does now.

Very wretched cricket is it, as may be expected; but the boys enjoy it, which is the main thing, though the marquis appears to be causing some trouble, for he has been given out "leg before wicket," and thinks fit to dispute the umpire's decision. Something of a wordy warfare is arising, when the younger brother, with a laugh, and a "Don't be a fool, Beau," throws oil on the troubled waters, and Beau—for that is the marquis's old nursery name—thinks fit to retire from the wicket, not ungraciously.

So the sun shines on, and all the beauties of summer and the country gladden the scene; the game waxes more merry and mirthful, and the play increases in vigour, till old Europa, winner of the Oaks fifteen years ago, finds herself alarmed by the flying leather, she having strayed rather too near to the prescribed ground. With a haughty snort she trots away, head and

tail up, as the scurrying fielder comes up in pursuit of the ball, and her foal thinks it is now time to have a gallop ; so away he goes, and his comrades catching the spirit, join him in a regular race to the entrance gate, where their boxes are, and back again.

* * * * *

It is the same scene, a few months later, in November. The beautiful hues of autumn leaves make some amends for the fresh green of summer, but the cricket-ground is no longer trim, and the foals now hold solitary state, having been weaned and thus promoted to the first step of independence. One looks in vain for the boys, but there, suddenly, at the far end of the old covert, a bevy of beaters comes in sight, and is skilfully ordered and disposed for the work in hand. There come the guns, one, two—six of them ; not too

many. Two, at a considerable interval, walk along on the low side of the covert, two go through the middle of it, and two are on the top side. There is room enough and to spare for all, and excellent shooting at the numerous rides. Right forward may be viewed sundry boys tapping the rails at the end of the young larch covert which we have previously observed; and this, no doubt, is to prevent the pheasants from running out and up into the big wood. What a cheery sound it is, even at this distance, the cry of the beaters, so various in its kind—"Shoo!" "Hey up there!" "Shoo Cock!" *cum multis aliis*, while the ceaseless rattling of their sticks against the trees seems but the presage of the expected flackering whirr of wings as the game rises. Ay, sure enough, the lordly pheasants are astir now, and the bang-banging grows gradually more frequent.

We can see it all very well, and note all the misses. Birds are now rising in numbers and skimming along forward to go down again among the young larches, and with a sharp eye one can catch sight of divers old cocks running warily in the same direction. The cream of the sport will evidently come last, so we wait quite in excitement till the party begins to emerge into the larches, and the guns get hurriedly forward, the two who are going through the middle evidently being sore let and hindered by an undergrowth of briars. The beaters are in line and are advancing. Pheasants rise at almost every step, and loaders are intensely busy, while guns wax unbearably hot. Those men in the middle have miscalculated the difficulties, for one of them is fairly wound up in brambles, and birds are going away almost from beneath his feet while he madly plunges and tries to

get extricated. Ah! he's all right at last, and with the rest has reached the rails at the end. On come the beaters, quite excited themselves now. Talk about warm corners! here's work indeed for all. The last ten or fifteen yards seem alive with pheasants. "Go at him again, your Grace!" shouts an aged beater to a portly-looking gentleman, who has missed clean with one barrel. "Well done!" as the bird drops to the second; and amid a fusillade of bang-banging, falling and flying birds, a regular harmony of delight seems to attune every mind in that party to a perfect chord—high and low sympathizing in the same pleasure of sport.

Great business is now done with the retrievers, and there is an old clumber spaniel who affords huge sport in pursuing a running cock pheasant up the hill to the big wood. "Well, Wilkinson, I'll back

the bird," cries the portly gentleman aforesaid to a hale, cheery-looking old fellow who has been shooting as well as any, and bears the mint mark of a farmer on him—at least so we think as we draw near and take stock. "Wait a bit, your Grace; more haste less speed, you know!" says he, as the bird, running fully twice as fast as the dog, reaches its desired haven. But the spaniel goes lumbering on, and, strange to say, reappears out of the wood after five or ten minutes with the pheasant in her mouth. "Bravo!" cries the duke, "Well done, old lady. I hope you won't forget me, Wilkinson, when next you have any pups to spare." The old man looks proudly on old Judy as she comes up with her game still alive, and gladly makes the promise *in re* pups. The shooting being over, he bids good-bye to the duke respectfully, yet as though conscious of mutual friend-

ship, and with a kindly "Good day, gentlemen," to the others, departs homeward, his son John, whom we have before met, toiling after him with a plentiful offering of game. Yes, this portly, good-humoured-looking gentleman is the Duke of Countryholm, and he and the party from the castle have been enjoying a quiet day's shooting, not with the assistance of imported grandees, but with that of plain John Wilkinson —the tenant farmer.

CHAPTER II.

> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the Imperial theme.
>
> *Shakespeare.*

A GRAND place, truly, is Castle Bolingbroke. Everything that can charm the antiquarian or delight the lover of romance is here: age unimpeachable, history full of striking incident, in token of which one may still note honourable marks of siege on the older stonework. This was Cromwell's doing in the main, against whom Sir Humphrey Bolingbroke made such an obstinate stand for God and the king. Ghosts, it is said, abound in the place, having a conscientious knowledge that their presence is necessary to add *éclat;* but for all the age, the history, and the ghosts, modern con-

venience has been skilfully introduced without altering in the slightest degree the general character of the rare old building. Much more trim now is the dainty lawn which reaches away smooth as a billiard-board to join the rougher park. A very Mecca of lawn-tennis players this, for to such more gentle uses has it come in these later days of peace. The embowering trees, which rear their lofty heads around it, could tell strange stories of blood and iron, were speech permitted them; but now they overshadow such tokens of quiet as the admirable garden-chairs of summer, and witness but the ruby of the claret-cup, or in Autumn—the present season—they shed their leaves and sleep, well knowing that they have no rude awakening to fear, yet they have been alive all these many years. They were *alive*—those same trees, when "old Noll" came thundering at the

gate, and perhaps under some of them he shaded his red nose from the noon-day sun! Have trees any feeling, any intelligence? It is not a question to be hastily laughed away; some dull sense there must surely be wherever there is life. What grand historians they would be if we could but understand them!

Away behind the castle extend many acres of a garden that knows no equal in the country. Such artistic arrangements of ferns and the rarest exotics it would puzzle the mind of man to imagine, much less describe; such rich profusion of orchard-houses, such inviting terraces, colonnades, and arbours! The duke took an especial pride in this garden: it was in some degree his hobby, and what that degree was may be judged from the fact that twenty men were constantly employed in gardening work.

The Duke of Countryholm was a typical Englishman, not brilliant, not calculated to shine in any sphere of life where genius is necessary; but full of that sterling common sense and mental stability which has conduced so much to the welfare of the English race. An old Tory he was, no doubt, and rather a dull one; for the race that knew not Pitt did certainly embrace the political aspirations of something not immeasurably more progressive than a barnacle, but he, nevertheless, inherited his full share of the good old English spirit, which, in the times of greatest trouble, has always provided a sort of ballast to the ship of state, and has steadied the nation in a way that no other race has ever been able to emulate. The duke was a man of sport, and a man possessed of an intense faith in the landed interest. He, like many others, could never bring himself to believe that manu-

facturing upstarts were indeed a power in the state; that the landed interest who had in times past held undisturbed power in the country—and that too, through no inglorious history—had come down now to share and share alike with the Manchester School or the Birmingham theorists. The 1832 Reform Act, which let these men and their disciples into something like a monopoly of office, had greatly embittered the feelings of the Duke of Countryholm against them; but among his own people, his own tenants, his own servants, his tenants' servants, and indeed, every man who was dependent on the Bolingbroke estate, he was the kindest and best-hearted man alive. Every one respected, but no one was afraid of him: nor was there ever a case of genuine hardship when the sufferer did not meet with the heartiest and most substantial consideration. Such a man

was the duke :—sufficiently capable of filling unimportant state offices when occasion offered, but eminently skilled in county government, in agriculture and all that pertains to the duties of a good landlord.

His children were but three in number: to two of them we have been already introduced; the third was a dear lively little girl of eleven, with big blue eyes like her dead mother. Yes, the duke, like other men, had had his troubles, for his had been no marriage of convenience; it was a pure love match, and she, though of a good old uhose, came to him without money or title. Mary D'Aguilar, daughter of old Squire D'Aguilar, well known as one of the keenest sportsmen in the country, had been the very prettiest girl and the best and the truest that it was possible to conceive. Whether at home, in the hunting-field, or

in society, she was alike charming, and she refused the duke three times before she married him, all because she feared that he might think she accepted him only for his title. Ah, well, it is useless to dwell on these matters of the dead past! That married life of which the happiness was almost unexampled in the annals of dukedoms, was cut all too short, for she died after the birth of her daughter; and her husband mourned for her truly and well, though not with the broken heart and foolish despair which characterize men whose existence begins and ends in novels.

An elder sister of the lost one undertook the family management, Miss Jane D'Aguilar, a very proper spinster indeed, and at the time we now speak of, nearer fifty than forty, old-fashioned in the extreme, and supposed to be impervious to Cupid's darts, though whether that was

owing to constitutional strength of mind or to the fact that no one had seriously essayed a conquest of her heart, deponent sayeth not.

The little daughter, Lady Mary, was the merriest soul alive, and but for her the castle would have been gloomy indeed. As it was, she managed to draw many a smile from "Dad," and to make prodigious sport for her brothers, and any other young fry that might be staying with them. Such an establishment would have been a dull one on the whole, perhaps, for the duke; but then he was greatly occupied out of doors, was much given to reading, had his place very often full of guests, and rejoiced moreover in the possession of a congenial private secretary.

Old Squire D'Aguilar, now well on to eighty years of age, still lives in his tumble-down house on the outskirts of Bolton.

Nay, more, he still makes shift to appear at the meets of the duke's hounds, mounted on some easily ambling old horse upon whose back he has climbed with difficulty from the mounting-steps. What a jolly old patriarch he looks, and not unable, even yet, to tackle his port with the best! Many and many a tale is told of him in his earlier days, how he would ride home across country at midnight; how he would perform marvellous feats of driving, achieve miracles at cock-fighting, disport himself as a patron of the prize ring, or use his own fists upon occasion. Now in his old days, his third daughter, whose husband, General Elliot, had recently met his death in the disastrous Afghan campaign, had come to live with him and keep the house. Her children, Tom and Jenny, were much the same age as their cousins at the castle, and of course, great friends with them, and

an especial delight of their cheery old grandfather.

And what a merry time these boys and girls used to have! We who have grown old and stale can, perhaps, hardly describe, much less appreciate the pleasures of that season when the mind is fresh and young, when the world seems so beautiful, when amusements are so much more amusing, and there is an infinite capacity for enjoyment. Cricket-playing we have already seen, but there were other joys innumerable—not least of these was in haymaking time, when it was a treat indeed to join the Wilkinsons or any of the other farmers in the work—spread and turn hay, make haycocks, fork hay on to carts—to the no small peril of good-natured occupants of the same, assist in treading down the stack, and relish from time to time exceedingly the allowance of bread and cheese,

with beer drunk in the tin measures or horns. Pretty work this for marquises, lords, and ladies ! you may say : no matter, it was work of the right sort to do away with all the absurd nonsense of class distinctions so industriously disseminated by Radical demagogues ; and, for our part, we believe that both the farmers' and the duke's children were better for their mutual fellowship.

Just now, in the Christmas holidays, the boys were having rare fun. Hunting, shooting—for they had already been entrusted with guns under the careful supervision of old Peter Stobbs, who had been the head-keeper, but was now pensioned off ; skating during the few days' frost ; ferreting rats and rabbits, in which pastime each was hugely interested as to the merits of his own particular terrier. Oh, the joys of these things are indeed seductive when

we are old; but when we are young, with the pulse of fresh life and unbroken spirit bounding within us, they are truly glorious. "Beau" and Henry had already been one term at Mugby School, and their cousin Tom Elliot was going back with them next time. Why this school had been selected we pretend not to determine, but must be content to chronicle the fact. Perhaps it was that the good Vicar of Bolton, Mr. Lee Fenwick, had himself been there, and had exercised some little influence with the duke as to the disposal of the youngsters. Old Mr. D'Aguilar did not care two straws about the matter so far as concerned Tom. The neighbouring grammar-school had been good enough for him, he grunted when his opinion was asked, but he supposed now the Reform Bill was passed no one would be content with what was good enough for their fathers. So the thing was settled.

By-the-way, in speaking of Mr. Lee Fenwick, we should have stated that he was of the very best type of a country clergyman—cheerful, hearty, and fond of sport, without being an atom deficient in devotion to his duties. He was well over fifty years of age, and during the twenty-five years since he had been presented to the living of Bolton, no reproach had ever been cast upon his conduct, or fault found with his actions. He had at last, however, done an unwise thing; for he had a short while before we introduce him, married a young wife. Yes, a girl of only eighteen, pretty enough beyond all question, and singularly attractive; but people called him an old fool, of course, shook their heads, said she was a terrible flirt, as indeed she was, and kindly suggested to one another that as none of her other married sisters had been exactly what they should be, she was, under the

circumstances, by no means likely to prove an exception to the family rule. Mrs. Lee Fenwick was the youngest daughter of Sir Rudolph Heatherbloom, and no one knew why she had married her husband; from pique against some one else, said some; certainly it could not be for love.

CHAPTER III.

Odora canum vis.

Mrs. Lee Fenwick was, at any rate, a favourite with the young people at the Castle, for she often met them hunting and when her worthy spouse had suffered from the inevitable handicapping force of age and dropped far behind in a good run, as he always did now, though his knowledge of the country served him in excellent stead. Finally, Mrs. Lee Fenwick came to riding out with the boys and only her groom whenever they went on a larking expedition, which was often enough. The good vicar stayed at home; his larking days were passed, and he knew the trusty groom would look well to his wife.

On one of these days, shortly before Christmas, Henry and "Beau," with their cousin Tom, had encountered the fair lady whom they all secretly adored with the ardour so common to such youthful imaginations, and as the air was beautifully clear and crisp, the sun quite invigorating, the boys' ponies very fit, and Mrs. Fenwick's horse ready for any amount of work, the spirit moved them to ride farther than usual right up the Pentern Hills, on the top of which is one of the finest training-grounds in England, and where the moors afford the most tempting habitation for the admirable grouse.

The young Marquis of Bolingbroke was much less carried away by the outer circumstances, which made Lord Henry and Tom fairly wild with excitement and ecstasy. Truly there is nothing more exhilarating than the brisk atmosphere of a sunny

winter's day, and when at such a time one is well mounted, with a grand, far-reaching view of scenery, it is a cold, insensible soul indeed that does not fairly boil over in the enjoyment of life and nature. But "Beau," or, to give his proper name, Gerard, the fourteen-year-old Marquis, rode quietly on by the side of Mrs. Fenwick, whose beautiful fair complexion showed at its best with the rich tinting of the keen air and the healthy exercise. No good was ever done by an attempt to describe women in black and white; so let it suffice that she was above middle height, with a glorious figure, inimitable eyes which played as it were into countless love-darts almost spontaneously, other features perfect, and expression angelic. What she said and did, being thus accoutred from Cupid's choicest armoury, is more to the point. This was something like it.

"What's the matter with you, 'Beau'?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, but there is. Look at Henry and Tom scampering away over there. Why aren't you in the same spirits as they are?"

"I don't know," and the boy looked wistfully at her, with all the soulful earnestness of first and very young love.

"You silly boy, I believe you've fallen in love with your cousin Jenny! Mind if I don't tell her when I get home."

This was more than the lovesick youth could endure. "No, no!" he cried, "Jenny, indeed! no, it's not Jenny," and then, fearful of having betrayed himself, he lapsed into silence and a blush.

"Who is it, then?" Now, why should Mrs. Lee Fenwick take a delight in following up this very unequal game? It is that, in the innate flirt's estimation, all's fish that comes to the net, and that really, lacking older material to work on, she does not

hesitate to play upon the feelings even of a boy; or was there in this case something attractive about captivating the future Duke of Countryholm? Of course she knew well enough how the land lay, and was deliberately pushing him into a corner. "Who is it, then?" Again the wistful look in reply, and the eyes filled with tears as he tried to speak but could not. Surely there is something feline about such a woman's nature, a veritable playing with the mouse before despatching it; but then the cat has this superiority, that she has after all an ultimate aim in view, i.e. to eat the mouse and benefit accordingly, while Mrs. Lee Fenwick had no ultimate aim or object whatever.

However, the conversation was broken in upon by the other boys who rejoined the strange couple. They had now reached the old training-ground, there was a

splendid chance for a gallop. "Come along, Mrs. Fenwick," cried Henry, his eyes sparkling with excitement, "you talk about that horse of yours, see if my little beast here can't beat him. I'll race you for sixpence to that clump of trees over there. Beau, you old surly, I'll bet you another sixpence I beat her." "I'll bet you a sovereign you don't," snapped Beau. "Oh, my eyes; you are coming it strong. Never mind, let it be a sovereign. Now, then, are you ready? Come on;" and away they all went, for it was impossible to resist Henry's spirits. He liked Mrs. Fenwick very much, too; but he meant to beat her for all that, and beat her he did, as many another small boy on a small blood pony has ere now beaten his elders. "Ha ha! Where's your sovereign, Beau?" cried he, as the lot pulled up after their gallop of about a mile. Beau looked hugely disgusted, but it was

not so much at losing his money as at the gross act of defeating Mrs. Fenwick.

The old groom came ambling up on his fat and panting steed, and then the advance was resumed. They all rode together now over the long expanse of grass which extended far beyond the training-ground, Henry and Tom keeping up a perfect fire of conversation; at one time chaffing "Beau" for being so glum over the loss of his sovereign ; at another plying Mrs. Fenwick with all the folly of boyish talk. As they at length came to the end of the flat table-land which they had been traversing, they found themselves at Callow Gill, where the range of hills was broken by a deep valley, down one side of which a winding road led them to where, snug and cozy amid ancient trees and near to the inevitable trout stream, were the ruins of the famous Abbey of Callow Grant, a great resort for the enter-

prising modern tourist, but habitually frequented by only some score of rustics dwelling in the neighbouring hamlet. But not with Callow Grant are we concerned. What are those white objects on the far side of the valley? Hounds, surely! Four, six, eight couple, in toilsome quest along the slope, slow but beyond measure musical. What can they be? what does it mean? The party pulled up and looked eagerly at this peculiar spectacle, but could not understand the position at all; never had they seen hounds making such slow progress with such an abundance of self-satisfied melody. Each member of the minute pack seemed to think that the moment when the spirit moved him to give tongue was an occasion of great importance, and by no means to be passed lightly by or impeded by any other movement. This was the way of it,—an advance of say ten yards with the nose

diligently pressed to the ground, and then an absolute halt for the protracted ceremony of tongue-giving, which was done with the head thrown well up and in the most impressive style.

"What on earth are they doing?" said Mrs. Fenwick. "Running a hare, I should think," replied Beau. "Look there!" cried Henry; "there's a man hunting them, don't you hear him hallooing in that cracked voice? Come on, Tom. Let's go and ask him what he's after," and forward they all went to where, some 200 yards away, on the road, stood a man holding a rough, unkempt young horse, while two other men on "galloways"—as the useful animal, which is a little less than horse and more than pony is styled—were a little distance away anxiously watching the pack. The man on foot was clad in trousers and leggings; his coat was a common old grey one,

and he wore a cap with ear-flaps. He never noticed the approach of strangers, but continued to encourage his hounds in one monotonous refrain: "Hark to Music! hark! hark to Music! hark!" and so on *ad infinitum.*

"Are you running a hare?" asked Beau, with some condescension. "Hare!" cried the man, turning on his questioner quite fiercely. "Hare! Ar should think not, indeed! These is t' Bilsdale hounds, and we've been runnin' a fox for four hours and more!" "Four hours!" ejaculated Henry. "How far have you come, then?" "Oh! we've never been above two mile from here," answered the man; "We've been goin' round and round, and better round. Hark to Music! hark! hark to Music! hark!" "Which is Music?" asked Tom, who had hitherto been standing in open-mouthed wonder at the

proceedings. "Why, yon old bitch; don't ye hear her? Ay, but she's a rare one to gie mouth!" And the strange huntsman pointed to a great mealy-pied old lady, evidently only on temporary absence from maternal duties, who appeared to have set herself the somewhat mythical task of making the welkin ring with her voice.

Great throaty brutes these hounds were, dewlapped, in good truth, like Thessalian bulls, a trencher-fed pack, retaining all the lumbering slowness of past-century notables. It was an amusing, yet not unpicturesque sight to view them toiling along the opposite bank with such scrupulous care. Hard is it to believe at the same time that they can kill a fox; that they can and often do is, however, certain, if the columns of the *Field* are to be believed. Nay, they have achieved runs the fame of which has passed into poetic

tradition; and often at the present day the occupants of local village public-houses are delighted by some musical one of their company singing the famous ditty, "Bilsdale Hounds." This is a tremendously long effusion, and, I believe, has never been published, so that something in the nature of an Homeric rhapsodist's memory is required by those to whom it is orally transmitted.

There is not much of general interest in it, yet one or two verses are very quaint, and so we reproduce them :—

"You hearty sons of chase give ear,
And listen to my song;
It's of a hunt wi' t' Bilsdale Hounds
That lately has been run.

The 19th of November last,
It being that very day,
With all our upsta'nch hounds we went
To covert straight away.

* * * *

'Tis forty-five miles it was, our chase,
In three hours' space it was run;
Our hunters true they did pursue,
And I name them every one:—
Dick Walkington on his chestnut horse,
Charles Harrison on his mare,
Jonah Bulmer and Len. Heseltine,
Peacock and Clarke was there.
So Landlord all our glasses fill
To let this toast go round,
Five couple of hounds of high degree—
And they viewed him on the ground!"

That forty-five miles in three hours savours somewhat of poetic licence; howbeit we may presume the run was a good one. Charles Harrison's name recalls the familiar incident of how this north-country farmer once bought a thoroughbred mare for a mere song, and was presented by her with a foal which developed into that good horse Strathnaver, and was only beaten about half a length from the winner in Blink Bonny's Derby. We have often

heard the old man tell the story. Alas! he will tell it no more.

A strange old-world set out are these Bilsdale hounds, and nothing connected with them is more strange than their ancient "whip," Bob Dowson—a little man whose most striking characteristic usually is an inordinately large cap. Great is the admiration entertained by Bob for his hounds. We recollect his bringing one to try for the hound prize at the Whitby dog show, when so rapt was he in the contemplation of his own exhibit that he never cast so much as a glance on the more fashionable competitors. No, there he stood in a corner of the judging-ring gazing with delight on the throaty old beast which he had led in, and holding up every now and then a piece of biscuit to make him show himself to advantage. At intervals he was heard to murmur,

"Nowt can ekal this dog, nowt can ekal this dog!"—but meanwhile the prizes had been awarded, and he suddenly found to his utter surprise that he and "this dog" were left alone and unhonoured in the ring. He has had a bad opinion of dog shows ever since.

But to return to our story:—Bob Dowson was nowhere visible on this occasion, and who the man hunting the hounds was our friends never knew, for, as they were watching, the scent seemed suddenly to improve, the hounds began to move at a better pace, and settling down in more businesslike fashion on the line, they topped the brow of the opposite hill and disappeared.

The man who had now ceased his chant of "Hark to Music! hark!" instead of evincing any desire to get at them, remarked, "Aye, well, Ar'll just ride down

the Gill and wait till they come back again," and, without more ado, he set off, leading his horse, and followed by the other two men, in a direction precisely opposite to that in which the hounds had gone.

"Did you ever see such nonsense?" said Henry. "Let's ride after the hounds," cried Tom. "No, you stupid," said Beau, "it would take us an hour and more to get round and up that hill. I vote we go home."

Mrs. Lee Fenwick also thought home was the best point for them to make for, and the old groom was fairly aghast at the idea of having to ride to hounds up the big rough hill that fronted them. As a result, therefore, they began to retrace their steps.

They had not gone far before they met a man riding a somewhat livery-stable

looking horse. He was striking in appearance, as he was garbed in a frock-coat, top hat, and trousers, the latter without straps. His face was far from beautiful, being notable for a small snub nose, very wide mouth, and heavy jawbones. The eyes, however, showed considerable intelligence, and there was something prepossessing in his voice as he raised his hat, disclosing long smooth hair brushed straight back, and said to the party generally, "May I ask if this is the way to Harrington?" "No, indeed," answered Mrs. Fenwick, taking upon herself the office of spokeswoman, "You are going just in the opposite direction." "Really," said the man, "I am most lucky to have met you, and greatly obliged for the information; I am quite a stranger here, having taken a longer ride than usual this morning. I started from Harrington, and

quite thought I had turned back towards it." "It's easy to get confused on the top of these hills," remarked the lady. "Well, we're going to Bolton," interposed Beau, "and Harrington's only two miles beyond that, so if you come along with us you'll be all right." "Thank you, I will," said the stranger, and forthwith ranged himself alongside Mrs. Lee Fenwick, rather to her disgust at first, and to the no small mortification of her youthful admirers.

But the man could talk and talk well, so that the fair lady's disgust presently vanished. There was all the strength of conscious intellect about him, with the power to apply it just according to the capacity of his companion. He interested Mrs. Fenwick, he amused her; indeed, she laughed outright, when, from formal remarks on Harrington and its characteristics as he found them, he treated her to various

exquisitely satirical sketches of some of the local dignitaries—how the chairman of the magistrates had pronounced judgment the other day in the case of a man whom an old woman had accused of bewitching her—or was it more proper to say bewizarding?—and the following were the words. "We are of opinion that there is not enough evidence to convict you. *You will be fined* 15*s. and costs.*" How the clergyman had drunk not wisely but too well the last Ash Wednesday, how Lord Scatterbrains had sold up two of his oldest tenants because Lady Scatterbrain's milliners' bills were pressing, how the Duke of Countryholm's boasted friendship with his tenants waxed with the approach of rent-day, and waned with its departure—"

"Stay, sir," here interposed Mrs. Lee Fenwick; "those are the duke's sons,"

pointing to the boys who were riding away in advance. "I beg your pardon, I am sure. I trust my thoughtless words have not vexed you; but here we are at Bolton, I know my whereabouts now. Your young companions are waiting for us, I see. May I ask, with all deference, if you will complete my information by telling me with whom I have had the pleasure of so agreeable a conversation?" There was something about the man that prevented any thought of refusal, so she just answered, "Oh! I am Mrs. Lee Fenwick; my husband is the vicar here. And you?" A surprised yet half-amused expression came over his face at this announcement, and he answered her question, "My name is Aspland. I have been living some months at Harrington. I hope we may meet again, and now I must wish you good-bye, with many thanks." He

cantered away, and she remained as if in a dream, not noticing when the boys bade adieu and left her to ride on with the groom to the vicarage, while they turned off home. This man, this Aspland was the notorious Atheist and Radical who was said to be demoralizing all the artisans in Harrington. She had often heard of him, she had now seen him.

CHAPTER IV.

"And next the schoolboy."—*Shakespeare.*

Mugby School in due course received the boys after the Xmas holidays and reopened that strange course of life which is so wholly unlike what any of us experience before or after. The system of fagging is there carried to an orderly perfection, and the various houses are managed almost entirely by the Sixth-form boys, who are hedged by the constitution of the school with an awful divinity. Much is to be said for a plan which reduces to a matter of school routine what is elsewhere the result of bullying and brute force, and it is probable that no one has ever been the worse

for going through a course of fagging; but there is a fatal tendency to engender confirmed priggishness and self-opinionated conceit among those to whom the power attendant on a position in the Sixth form is entrusted. At an early age to have a whole host of your fellows at your beck and call, and to be able to exercise over them the control usually only proceeding from masters, is a perilous pinnacle for any one to be elevated to, and though there are very many honourable exceptions, it cannot be denied that the general character of Mugby men has suffered in consequence. The Marquis of Bolingbroke, Lord Henry Gainsborough, and Tom D'Aguilar were all fags, and in the same form—Lower Middle I.—as it was called, and Mr. Evans' house was the one selected for them. Here they managed to live tolerably, the two brothers having one study, and Tom being

put into another with a boy named Bertrand, whose Spanish blood was shown alike in his countenance and excessive irascibility. Tom at once was smitten with an extreme desire to tease and try his companion's temper, and the results were amusing, if not edifying.

What a horrid thing is the early experience of school! No one, probably, looks back with pleasure to that period of life when, for a term or so, he is, as it were, on probation—an inferior being among his fellows; and, at Mugby, compelled to wear a tall hat as the badge of his shame, being a new fellow. There is a fixed space of time during which the unfortunate novice is liable to be asked his name by any one who has been at the school for a longer time, and the slightest divergence from the humblest demeanour and action is at once visited with condign wrath, if

not chastisement. The new fellow is made to feel that his newness is a despicable thing, and to yearn for the period when the good scythe-bearer shall have deprived him of it, and enabled him to gain the honour that pertains to all things ancient, even in the small scale of school career. Lords and marquises are thought no more of than other boys by their companions at school; but the Mugby masters were in some measure concerned to make the most out of the young Bolingbroke. A very free-thinking set of Radicals were those Mugby masters, and without going so far as to say, "Here is the heir, come let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours," they strove to poison his mind with all the deleterious dogmas of Radicalism, and to so educate him that he might give triumphant evidence of their skill and material aid to their political tenets by developing into

a Radical duke. Henry they cared little about, for, while abhorring the law of primogeniture, they despised a younger son.

It would be of little use to go into many details of the doings of our boys at Mugby. The enforced football, at which Tom and Henry early began to distinguish themselves; the house runs, "Big Side" runs, and paper chases, to all of which "fags must come, or carry coats"—that is to say, either run or take the coat at the start of some one who does run, and meet him with it at the finish; these, not to mention the "house washings," in which every one is compelled to follow the lead of a good jumper whenever and wherever he takes the brook—a proceeding that is only terminated when every one, including the leader, has had a good ducking; the cricket, the steeple-chases, and other athletic sports, are all vitally interesting at the

time, but would seem in these pages only like dry husks, which a presumptuous writer was trying to galvanize into something like life.

We may, however, tell a little anecdote of Tom, in which that young gentleman's love of mischief was productive of some amusement. He had already begun to notice the effect of the Mugby masters' ministrations on Beau. A certain glimpse of priggishness had appeared, and this excited a desire on Tom's part to play jokes on the youthful marquis, whom he had never liked so well as his bolder and more thoughtless brother. Being also anxious to have sport with his study companion Bertrand, he decided by astute diplomacy, to set him and Beau at loggerheads with one another. The thing was very easily done. Bertrand was very proud of the study carpet, and so Tom decided to

attack him on that point. He scattered a shovelful of coals over the floor in Bertrand's absence, and was found ruefully contemplating them when that impetuous youth returned. Tom gave no definite explanation, but just remarked, "Well, I didn't think Bolingbroke would have done such a thing!" Not another word was needed; away flew Bertrand to the study of Beau and Henry, and, finding no one there, hurled the contents of the coal-box all over the room, and dashed the newest and best books in confusion on the floor. Meanwhile Tom, chuckling desperately at the success of his nefarious scheme, went and found the innocent marquis, who was eating ices at Gobley's, the favourite vendor of edibles. "I say, Beau," cried Tom, "you had better go and look after your study. There's Bertrand making awful hay in it." Off ran Beau, leaving a punch ice half

finished, and Gobley unpaid, but did not arrive in time to catch the fell destroyer at work. He found, however, the terrible state of chaos into which the study was reduced, and was enraged beyond measure to find a prize book and two or three other well-bound ones considerably damaged. Without more ado, he rushed to inflict condign chastisement on the offender, but discovered, to his intense chagrin, that Bertrand had barricaded himself into his study, and was laughing audibly at the impotent kicks which his maddened enemy inflicted on the door. Finding that kicking the door availed not, and was only likely to attract the attention of some Sixth fellow, who would set him "lines" for "scrummaging" in the passages, Beau desisted, and proceeded to reconnoitre by looking through the keyhole. There was Bertrand, sure enough, sitting at his

writing-table close under the window. Now the studies were all on the ground floor, looking out into a quadrangle, and each window was provided with a flower-box, and it flashed into the mind of the irate Beau that if he stole round into the quad. he could, with ease, take a large handful of earth and put it through the window upon the head of Bertrand. This was scarcely sooner thought of than done, and it was very healing to irritated feelings to hear Bertrand jump up on receiving the earthy head-dressing and go stamping about the study with Spanish execrations. The best of the joke was, however, yet to come. Having provided himself with a piece of broom-handle, used bludgeon-wise, Bertrand cautiously unlocked the door and waited, thinking it probable his assailant might try once more to get in, and determined, this time, to give him it

hot. Meanwhile Tom arrived in the house, and was wending his way round the passage to the study when he met Collier, one of the Sixth form. "Was that you making all that noise in your study, D'Aguilar?" "No, I've only just come into the house." "It must be Bertrand, then. Go and tell him to stop it at once, and say I shall be round directly to make him give an account of himself." Tom hurried to the study and narrowly missed being attacked on his entrance by Bertrand, who was somewhat blind, but quite tiger-like in his desire to spring upon his hated foe. "Waiting for Beau?" said Tom, with another happy thought. "Then look out. He's coming now—almost directly!" The prospect of speedy encounter redoubled the pent-up wrath of Bertrand, and he braced every muscle to leap resistlessly on the devoted one. Tom sat by and

watched, a little alarmed lest he had gone too far. In a few moments came a knock, the door opened, and then there arose a scene of combat and confusion, Bertrand having launched himself with fury upon the enemy, whom he belaboured with the broom-handle about the head in terrific fashion, kicked, and otherwise spitefully entreated. The enemy, however, after the first moments of surprise, arose, and seizing Bertrand with superior strength overcame and held him. Then, and not till then, did Bertrand perceive that it was not Beau at all, but Collier!

What a splendid tableau from Tom's wickedly mischievous point of view! "Are you mad, Bertrand?" cried Collier. "Oh! I'm so awfully sorry," gasped Bertrand, "I didn't know it was you, indeed I didn't. I thought it was Bolingbroke." "Well, whoever you thought it was you equally

deserve punishing: write me out 1000 lines of Virgil, and think yourself lucky I don't get you a 'Sixth licking' for what you've done," and Collier stalked away in high state of mental and bodily irritation. Tom was beginning to feel quite penitent for the evil he had wrought, when Bertrand, remembering to whom the mistake was originally due, burst into ungovernable wrath, seized a curious Spanish knife, which was hung as an ornament on the wall, and with a cry of "Caramba!" or something like it, stabbed Tom in the leg as he was lolling on the sofa. The knife only penetrated about three-quarters of an inch, close by the shin-bone; but both boys were much alarmed, and Bertrand's rage evaporated in an instant when he found what he had done. A *tourniquet* was improvised with a pocket-handkerchief and a stick; and the good matron and a doctor after-

wards put the wound all right, and it was never known not to have been accidental. It was some little time before Tom could walk about, but the war once set on foot between Beau and Bertrand continued to rage fiercely. The first time the juvenile Bravo saw his chance, as Beau was walking alone down the passage, he rushed from his study, hurled after him a large piece of an oak bracket, and followed this up in person with the broomstick. Before Beau could recover himself and return the attack, Bertrand was gone and locked into his study, where he could be heard indulging in triumphant laughter.

Henry presently became inspired with anger against Bertrand for his misdeeds in their study and against his brother, and knowing the peculiar attachment of the boy to his trusty but objectionable broomstick, went calmly into Bertrand's study in

the evening, when he and Tom were sitting there hard at work on Latin verses, and under pretext of borrowing a book, unhitched the broomstick from the nail where it was hung and fled. Bertrand was aware in a moment of the outrage and gave chase. The passage outside was straight and of some length—being the whole of one side of the square which formed the studies, and Beau, who had been waiting outside, ran one way while Henry scuttled off in the other. Fearing, however, that he could not possibly get round the corner without being caught by his pursuer, Henry flung the broomstick up the passage over Bertrand's head, and Beau instantly secured it. Bertrand turned and went for the new possessor of the cherished staff, but he, too, threw it down the passage to Henry again just in the nick of time, and over Bertrand's head. Thus did they keep the

frantic youth rushing up and down, till suddenly Collier came out of his study, when Beau and Henry instantly disappeared round the respective corners, and Bertrand was discovered, to all intents and purposes, flying backwards and forward in the passage all by himself. Collier immediately set him a long imposition for "scrummaging in the passages!"

But these matters, important and amusing as they seemed to the actors in them, do not greatly affect our story. So let us hurry the boys along through the term at school, Beau all the while increasing in favour with the masters, and developing, in consequence, the fatal priggish tendencies; Henry left pretty much to his own sweet will, thoughtless and idle, but brilliant on occasion; Tom incorrigibly idle and, so far as school learning goes, dense, making good progress, however, together

with Henry, in all games and athletic exercises. Let them pass on, thinking, perhaps, at this period of their careers, more of Saturday evening suppers purveyed by Gobley into the house, and of the merriment thereunto appertaining, than of any sterner aspect of life. Let them go on, with difficulty rising at 6.30 a.m., having been called by the strange old house butler with his systematic expressions, "Gentlemen, please,"—then, after going over each name in the bedroom separately,—"If you please, gentlemen!" At a quarter to seven the chapel bell began to ring, and how hateful was that sound to those who had snoozed off again on a cold winter's morning! Some one who *had* already got up would open one of the clanking diamond-shaped windows to listen, and, on hearing it, would arouse all the sleepers by the horrid cry of "Bell!" Then there was

but a quarter of an hour to get into school for prayers, with punishment for those who failed. Fearful work was getting up and dressing under such circumstances—a thing only to be accomplished by boys; and to our dying day we will maintain that more lie-abed men are made by the system which forces abnormal rising on them when young than would exist under any other conceivable circumstances.

Well, get on to the end of term, the school concert, the house suppers, with speeches to be made by sundry of the boys, the whole atmosphere breathing delicately of "breaking up and going away all for the sake of a holiday." There is a delicious refinement of pleasure about that last morning when final prayers are over, and fags are no longer subservient to the Sixth form. Something of a temptation exists to linger about the place in all the enjoy-

ment of emancipation; but the inevitable train time comes, and with "journey money" extortionately ample, we depart on our respective journeys, to be a trouble and tribulation to such railway officials as may be unfortunate enough to hold responsible positions on the line that we patronize. However, what matter? In the words of a respected old Mugby master,—

Nondum cancellarii
Sumus, aut episcopi;
Ergo fratres gandeamus,
In loco desipiamus,
Equales, sodales,
Citate clamate—
"Floreat, floreat, floreat Mugbeia!"

CHAPTER V.

"To the West, to the West!—
To the land of the free."

Henry Russell.

It was an early session of Parliament, and the Duke of Countryholm was in town, for he always attended zealously to such prospect of duties as still pertains to the Upper House. Miss Jane D'Aguilar, being a necessary portion of his establishment, was there also; and he was not a man to relegate his little daughter, Lady Mary, to the charge of servants in the country—besides, he liked to have her with him—so she was in town, too. Gainsborough House, in Park Lane, was always a notable place;

but the duke, who was now in the strongest opposition to ministers, was unusually magnificent in his display. Receptions of the most striking character followed one another with unaccustomed rapidity; dinners, social, political, and quasi-official, were given with increasing success; and it was on all hands recognized that the Duke of Countryholm was the man to follow; not because he inspired any one with intense admiration of his intellect, but because his family power was immense, the prestige of his name was great, his reputation for common sense not inconsiderable, and, above all things, he was "so sound in his views," "such a safe man" upon all important questions.

Now London was all very well for the duke, under these circumstances, and for Miss D'Aguilar, who, of course, did the honours of the house, but it was somewhat

slow for poor little Mary, who was deprived of her companion, Jenny D'Aguilar, that young lady remaining at home with her mother; and of this the duke was very soon aware. It troubled him no little, for though pompous and almost ponderous in his thoughts on men and politics, for his little daughter he was all simplicity and almost childish sympathy.

Now it so happened that Mr. Desanges, the American millionaire, of world-wide reputation, had come over to study English manners and customs, possibly to increase his already vast wealth. He had with him his wife in the fullest bloom of matronly beauty, and a daughter, Dorothy, just about the same age as Lady Mary Gainsborough. A beautiful little child, this Dorothy; she had already attracted the attention of the first of English painters, and was immortalized by him—at least so far as his canvas

and colours could be imperishable. Big dark eyes, magnificent chestnut hair, well-formed features, health and vigour in every movement of the well-shaped limbs: here, if anywhere, was the making of a lovely woman.

Somehow or other Mr. Desanges and the Duke of Countryholm struck up an acquaintance. There could not be two men more unlike; perhaps that was the reason. The duke felt something refreshing about the free outspoken opinions of the American, not but what they were rather irritating at times; and Mr. Desanges, on the other hand, like so many of his countrymen, had a wistful tenderness for the titles and institutions of the old country while affecting to despise them. One evening, when Mr. Desanges had been dining in company with numerous diplomatic and other celebrities at Gainsborough House, he suddenly came

out with the following to the duke: "I wonder, sir, that you Englishmen can ever submit to be ruled by a woman!"

The duke half gasped in astonishment, and was greatly relieved by a young gentleman who sat near the American, and laughed the matter off with the old platitude, "The Queen doesn't rule, she reigns."

The duke's dignity had been greatly ruffled for a moment, but he decided to treat the matter lightly, and said, "It's better, at all events, than being crushed by a Caucus, as you good people are, Mr. Desanges."

"Crushed!" cried the American. "I should like to see the Caucus that tried that game with me!"

"Nevertheless," said the youthful diplomatist who had spoken before, "you will not dispute that for people who are not rich there is in America very little individual

freedom, except of manners and conversation."

"And, on the other hand," added the duke, quite warming as he saw the strength of his position, "those who *are* rich have in America a freedom which is not quite consistent with official morality."

"Well," retorted Mr. Desanges, "the theory of our government is right at any rate; anything you say touches only matters of practical detail."

"We are satisfied, then," answered the duke, "if we get a good practical result, which we undoubtedly do, and are in that case careless of the theory under which that result is achieved. You, it would seem, are careless of the result, provided you are satisfied with your theory."

"Not exactly: we have always an eye for the main chance. But to tell you truth, sir, we don't mean half we say when we

laugh at your old forms of government. They wouldn't do for us, of course, because we are a young nation, but we shouldn't like to see you without them. We wouldn't stand any kings, queens, and lords in the States, but, bless you, we feel quite different about the old country. You are, after all, what we have to turn to for our own history, and we like to have you and your institutions as it were an heirloom for us to look at and think about, for one can't always think about business, you know."

"Well, Mr. Desanges," said his host, "I am glad to hear you say that; for I should have been sorry to think you had any sympathies with our Radicals."

"Sympathies, sir? Antipathies you should say. If there is one man above all others that we abominate, it is a British Radical. It seems to us amazing that such a constitution as the British one should

have been fixed for a free nation; we couldn't stand it for ourselves, but that's a very different thing from wishing to prevent you from getting on well under it. Your constitution carries you along very nicely; and so I say confusion to all those who would upset it!"

By degrees the Duke of Gainsborough and Mr. Desanges began to have more frequent discussions of the above kind, and each felt his mind enlarged by the other. The one represented the free, outspoken, hard realities of the world of business; the other the deeper thoughts attaching to noble traditions, the sentiment that clings round the records of our history, the spirit which teaches us that the past is not an evanescent shadow, but one of our most valuable possessions. The American readily appreciated the truth of English Toryism, that policy which, regarding our institutions

as the natural and convenient outcome of the nation's wants, will not permit the strong and sturdy growth of ages to be rudely destroyed, though any amount of judicious pruning may be done ; and the duke as readily understood how a Republican form of government was adapted for America. "It is one thing," said he, "to build a new ship on a new design, quite another to alter an old one." What became, however, most clearly apparent was the wide distinction between an American Republican and an English Radical. Radicalism which draws its motive power from mere predatory instinct exists in a marked form in England on account of the large population and the small amount of land. Radicalism, in this sense, has small reason to exist in America, and your good Republican there is no more concerned in coveting and confiscating the goods of his

neighbours than is the stoutest old Tory among us. Our Radicalism makes aspirations after a Republican form of government a stalking-horse to hide its real aims, which are simply plunder ; and it is quite certain that under any conceivable form of government whatsoever our Radicalism would with various pretexts pursue its sinister course.

Mr. Desanges had taken a house in Queensgate for the season, and there his wife in no long time became a notable personage. Various decided eccentricities of manner were ascribed to her nationality, and she was voted a really good sort by the *jeunesse dorée* of the period, who more and more delighted to honour her. Her husband, whom we should have described as a tall, handsome man, with dark hair and eyes, an honest expression, and a goatee beard, all the while became more and more

absorbed in his study of things English. He had taken quite a craze for listening to debates in either of the Houses, and generally he troubled the wife very little with his company.

Among other frequent visitors to the house in Queensgate was a youthful nobleman—the Earl of Sevenoaks, particularly handsome, not wondrous wise, and only twenty-two years of age. His property was immense, and his ancestral honours were overwhelming. Mrs. Desanges, as we have intimated, was a very handsome woman; one of the sort who improve with age up to forty, and she was only thirty-five as yet. She was in some degree tired of Mr. Desanges, and she was not beyond the feminine weakness for a coronet. Well, we do not wish to dwell on the matter. Mrs. Desanges ran away with Lord Sevenoaks; he, poor youth, falling of course a

ready victim, and conceiving himself to be vastly lucky. It was a nine-days' wonder: Mr. Desanges was for a while furious, and went about in vain search, but ere long he settled quietly down in town again, and took renewed pleasure in his friendship with the Duke of Countryholm. A first consequence of this was that his little daughter, Dorothy, was transferred to Gainsborough House, so that she and Lady Mary might be companions. So well did these young ladies agree, and so attached did they become, that it was determined not to part them; and thenceforth Dorothy Desanges, who, of course, knew nothing of her mother's shame, became a fixture in the family. Her father was delighted that she should have been so fortunate, and was really touched by the kindness of his new friend, who, without ever having alluded, except in a few earnest words of sympathy,

to his wife's conduct, had provided the very thing he wanted—the proper care for his daughter, and all as if he (the duke) was receiving and not conferring a benefit

So Dorothy and Mary became fast friends, and were together subjected to the wearisome course of masters and other instructors: together they made fun of prim old Miss D'Aguilar; together they took such enjoyment out of life in town as is possible for children, not but what they quarrelled sometimes; of course they did, else had they belied their sex; but tiffs and strife of the kind mentioned are seldom, if ever, of the slightest importance. Dorothy would sometimes be too cool and collected for Mary, Mary sometimes too fantastical and boisterous for Dorothy; but they dearly loved one another, and Miss D'Aguilar was fain to own that an arrangement on which she had at first

looked with some disfavour was eminently successful. Some spiteful person whispered that she had an eye to the time when Mr. Desanges should have obtained his divorce and would be free to marry again; but who, looking at her prudish features, could believe such a thing? Doubtless it was from the purest motives that she grew constantly more kind to Dorothy, albeit the girl was given to making drily humorous remarks on her, such as the following:—"Well, Miss D'Aguilar, I'm just frightened to death of going to the dentist to-day." "Nonsense, dear; I've often gone, and not minded a bit." "Oh! no more should I mind if I were you!" (it was shrewdly suspected by the girls that Miss D'Aguilar had false teeth); or, "Miss D'Aguilar, Simson (the butler) tells me people give something for old bottles and take them away; hadn't you better have

your room cleared out?" The room was full of unguents and washes, mysterious and otherwise, which showed in a tremendous array of bottles. "Certainly not, my dear; I want all the things in my room for myself." "Well, I just thought you might be turning them to better use." But the end of the season was drawing on. The duke went off yachting, and Mr. Desanges accompanied him. The periodical seaside visit supervened for the girls, their governess, Miss D'Aguilar, accompanying them; and with the notification that in due course they made their way to Bolingbroke Park, we will leave them for a while, and pass on to observe the doings of other persons.

CHAPTER VI.

"By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes!"

THERE is a footpath over the fields between Harrington and Bolton, and a good deal of it is very secluded, as it passes through a wood of very considerable size, and winds along for some half mile of that portion by the bank of the River Esk, which has a considerable and well-wooded slope on either side. Travellers here are few and far between; indeed, since the new road has been made, which is considerably more direct, the few persons who want to go from Bolton to Harrington, or from Harrington to Bolton, almost invariably choose the more convenient route.

Now, however, in the glorious sunset, on a summer's evening, we have to notice two persons who have patronized the old path. They are standing where, from the thickest part of the wood you can look down at the waters of the Esk coursing swiftly along below, undulating over the boulders in all the beauty of shallow clearness, set off by the reflected lights of the departing sun. On the other side rises the far-reaching slope, clad in a varied growth of fine old trees that whisper as they wave in the cool evening air. Two persons—a man and a woman. Heavens! they are John Aspland and Mrs. Lee Fenwick! How strange it is that they, of all people, should be together at such a time, and in such a place! And they are talking very earnestly; there is a calm, half-contemptuous look of conscious power on Aspland's ill-favoured countenance, while

his pretty companion seems troubled in her mind, unhappy, one might almost say, over some unavoidable evil. "Ah! John!" yes, she calls him by his Christian name. "Tell me that you think you are wrong; can you look on this scene and still adhere to what you have told me? How sweet is every breath of the summer evening air? Don't you feel the divine sweetness of it! Can it be that all the beautiful works of nature are self-made, self-moved?" "My dear little woman, you are growing quite sentimental again! I won't go into the matter with you any more. You are nervous to-night, and hence your childish fancies. You know as well as I do, when you grow calm again, that it's all nonsense. Come, let us be moving on, for your worthy vicar will be crying aloud for his flesh pots." "Yes, yes," replied she, "of course you are right: but it seems so dismal and

dreary to step away from thoughts such as influenced me just then out into the cold world of unbelief; it is like turning one's back on dear old friends, and finding none to replace them." "A proper appreciation of the world and its pleasures will make ample amends for the loss of vague possibilities," said Mr. Aspland, with a forbidding smile. "Come, let us go on, you are not half established yet on the firm intellectual basis which I have so carefully prepared for you; but you'll improve, you'll improve." Mrs. Lee Fenwick looked wistfully once more across the river, glanced at the sunset which had all the while been growing more wonderfully beautiful, and then, with a slight shiver and a half-forced look of contentment, put her arm quietly in his, and the two passed away out of sight, through the wood, in the direction of the vicarage.

Now what can all this mean? It means simply that the man, Aspland, having by evil chance met Mrs. Lee Fenwick, as we described at an earlier part of this book, deliberately set himself to work to fall in with her on future occasions, and to win her over to his own degraded state of Atheism. His motives in singling her out were several. Firstly, she was the wife of a vicar, and consequently a particularly fitting object for attack; secondly, the man was, as it were by profession, a proselytizing Atheist; thirdly, she was a pretty woman, and he had had ample proofs that all the old-world ideas on virtue, morality, &c., vanish with the destruction of religious belief. It would need no great acumen on the part of Aspland or any one else to foresee such a result for a creed which levels men to the position of the beasts that perish, and leaves them no reason for

acting on any high principles. It would ill-become us in this book to go through the vile details of the siege which he laid to the conscience of this poor woman. She was wholly unskilled in argument, and had accepted her belief, such as it was, in a simple, childlike fashion. At first she was far from pleased at meeting Aspland in her rides or rambles, and it cannot be said that she ever liked him; but the sheer force of the man's will was such as to exercise over her some sort of fascination, and as the snake by merely looking at a bird can make it fall into its grasp, so did Aspland, by will rather than words, gain complete power over his victim, cause her to renounce all her old faith, and make her a mere puppet in his hands to do with as he would. The subject is not a pleasant one, but the facts of it must be chronicled, and that having been done, there is no

need to dwell on it just now. It is simply important for the reader to be aware of the relations between these two parties.

Aspland had continued to live at Harrington, and had established a hall, where he periodically lectured, and strove to do the utmost damage both to the souls and bodies of his fellow-men by his abominable doctrines. As is always the case, when a demagogue is loud enough and thick-skinned enough, he attracted a considerable following, and the results of his lectures were soon apparent in disputes between workmen and employers; farm-labourers, too, were beginning to grow unsettled, and where all had been a happy family before, the hateful emphasizing of class-distinctions by this man, Aspland, began to engender discord and disunion. This state of things was far from universal; Aspland had to meet with many rebuffs

such as he got from honest John Williamson when he went preaching to that worthy yeoman on the iniquity of landlordism. "Now, look here, Mr. Aspland, or whatever they call you, it isn't a bit of good you coming here, or to any of the duke's tenants, and talking against him. If it wasn't for the duke our farms wouldn't be half what they are, and though you can't understand how the old family is part and parcel of the place in our minds, I tell you it is so. We like his Grace, and I am proud to say he likes us. But, outside all that, it may be grand philosophy to say that men who have sunk their money in land, or have had land left to them by their fathers, shouldn't be allowed to make the most they can of their own—but it isn't honesty, sir, and that's flat; so don't let me hear any more about it."

Still, Aspland's progress was undoubted,

and it was rumoured that he actually intended contesting the seat for Harrington at the next election. Such an idea made the hair of sober country folk fairly stand on end, but it gained credence, none the less, for why otherwise was the man devoting so much attention to the place?

Old Squire D'Aguilar had waxed furious on the subject of "that blackguard Aspland" on several occasions, and in the fervour of his eloquence at a Conservative meeting went so far as to dub him "a ticket-of-leave man." This was at once seized on by the local Radical paper as a specimen of brutal Tory intolerance, and Mr. D'Aguilar was fain to make a grumbling apology, which he did by saying that, being no great master of words and phrases, he said the first thing he could think of in his wish to express disapproval of Mr. Aspland; he did not mean that he was a

ticket-of-leave man, and he was sorry he called him one; what he meant to convey was that Mr. Aspland, judged as a candidate for parliament, was quite as objectionable as a ticket-of-leave man.

John and Charles Wilkinson had attended one of Aspland's lectures, and the latter was forcibly expelled for hurling an orange at the lecturer when in the midst of a verbose torrent of blasphemy. John stayed till the end, and came away somewhat in the dumps. He told old Peter Stobbs' daughter Polly, a red-cheeked, blooming little maid of about his own age, that old Aspland was a fine talker, but he shouldn't go to hear him again, he thought, as his lecture sort of upset you.

But to return to the evening with which we have to deal. Aspland, having escorted Mrs. Lee Fenwick to the outskirts of the wood, returned musingly along the same

pathway, until suddenly, where the descent to the river was most precipitous, he was startled by meeting an old woman, whose short, tattered old dress, displayed a considerable proportion of thin legs, with coarse woollen, blue stockings, and large boots. A straw bonnet of the most primitive description completed the attire; but the face at once riveted attention, for it indicated clearly an unsound mind. The half-vacuous, half-cunning eyes had in them the indescribable sign of madness, and the hair growing on the chin afforded another very common proof. Why mad women should be apt to grow beards, no one seems to know; but the fact is so, nevertheless. Aspland recognized the woman at once; it was "Silly Bessy," as the Bolton people call her—a harmless creature enough, it was always thought.

"Well, Bessy," he said cheerfully,

"you're on your way home, are you?"

The woman seemed strangely excited, and, without answering his question, cried out in tones increasingly shrill, "Bad man, devil's man—bad, bad, bad!"

Aspland was astonished, but tried to pass quietly on. He wondered how she could have taken a dislike to him. Bessy stationed herself on the path in front of him, and, with outstretched arms, prevented him from passing; while her wild appearance and the dangerous gleam of her eye caused something almost like a thrill to shake his iron nerves.

"I saw you and her," continued Bessy. "God has left you; a-a-ah! bad man!" and she waxed quite furious, while Aspland felt somewhat taken aback; though to any one who could have observed the scene, it would have appeared in some

degree ridiculous. He again tried to go on, but Bessy, waxing more and more furious, fairly screamed aloud as she pointed to the river below, "See, the water is ready for you! You will die, you will die, you will die!" Each repetition of the word "die" was uttered more shrilly, and then, after a short pause, during which the woman's expression was almost terrible, she cried, "I see you; there is blood on your head; ha, ha! the river has got you! You are dead! Praised be heaven, you are dead!"

Aspland was, however, far from dead, and so he pushed the poor, crazy creature roughly on one side, and went on his way, angry with himself for having been conscious of a sort of creeping feeling over a matter which his common-sense told him was simply absurd. Nevertheless he could not refrain from casting a glance back

occasionally, and it was with no great pleasure that he saw Silly Bessy following him in the distance, waving her skinny arms, and at times bursting into meaningless shrieks of mad laughter, at times yelling after him, always on the subject of his death or of his meeting with Mrs. Lee Fenwick. He stalked through the town of Harrington to his abode with as much dignity as he could, under the circumstances, but Bessy, having drawn nearer, caused much excitement and amusement at his expense. "That's right," cried a boy, "give it 'im 'ot, Bessy." "Well, I never could abide that Haspland," said a man; "depend on it, Bessy has something agin him, or she'd never take on like that." "Why," cried a jovial blacksmith, "even a poor lunatic 'bominates a Hatheist!" And so, 'mid jeering of boys and unfavourable comments from their

elders, did Aspland pass along the streets, till he at length found refuge from his somewhat ludicrous position by shutting the door of his own house in Bessy's face. But still the last words of hers which he heard rung in his ears, "Ha, ha! I saw you dead, and the river took you!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Dulce est desipere in loco."—*Horace.*

SOME years have now passed away, and our boys at Mugby School are approaching the end of their time there. Beau and Henry are both in the sixth form. Henry, however, despite the favour extended to his elder brother, is in the higher place, being second in the school, while the other is fourth; but it must be remembered that at Mugby places in the sixth are not changed in order of merit; but you just move up as those above you leave, and others come on from below. So the masters opined that though Henry some two and a

half years earlier had, by a sudden brilliant flash, as it were, managed to get into the form ahead of his brother, there could be no doubt now that, having been more or less idle since then, he would have fallen behind so far as merit went, especially as they had always kept Beau up to the mark, according to their lights.

Tom Elliott was only in the lower fifth, and did not seem likely to rise higher; but he was a credit to the school for all that, being accounted the best public-school bat of the season, and withal having attained to well-deserved popularity owing to his genial and social qualities.

There had been a change of head-masters. The worthy doctor, who had from the first thoroughly won the hearts of all the boys —for he was, it must be noted, a very different sort from his under-masters—had been promoted to a bishopric, and his suc-

cessor had two great defects in the eyes of his unwilling subordinates—he was a Conservative, and a sound Churchman. From the period of his arrival at the school there commenced a course of procedure by these under-masters which showed to an extent, scarcely dreamed of, till then, the miserable narrow-mindedness, the intolerant bigotry, the unprincipled malice and reckless spite of men who claim to be advanced thinkers. The new doctor, without being a great man, was fully capable of doing most efficiently the duties which devolved on him; but the greatest of men could not have succeeded under the system of organized disrespect and patent obstruction with which the masters strove to render his position untenable. There was but one way of dealing with the difficulty, and that was to pack them all off, bag and baggage. This he naturally did not wish to do. He had some

idea that Mugby masters would not be wholly deaf to the voice of reason, and as his sole desire was to work harmoniously with them for the good of the school, he thought—good, easy man—that all would soon be well. But therein was he grievously mistaken. Reason is not dreamed of in your modern Radical's philosophy. With him the old question of sympathy or antipathy rules the roast; and thus it happened that the more Dr. Grasslad did to show himself worthy of his position and of their respect, the more did these masters hate him, with an exceeding bitter hatred; inasmuch as the task of ousting him was rendered less easy.

What a contemptible figure they cut on the first speech-day, at which Dr. Grasslad presided, when he, in addressing the usual large audience, after saying how difficult it was for him to succeed so distinguished a

man as had gone before him, alluded in the most amiable terms to the assistance which he had received from the zealous staff of under-masters! How angry some of them were, too, when at a later date he instituted a Hebrew class, and out of pure kindness asked them if they would join it! The men knew no Hebrew, and would have been glad to learn it: but the ignominy of finding that *he* was able to teach *them* was too much.

So Mugby was hardly what might be called thriving at this period; but the boys enjoyed their life pretty much the same. Henry liked the doctor: Beau was on the side of the masters: Tom didn't care two straws about one side or the other.

It was reserved for a later day and another head-master, whose name will ever be loved and respected, to bring back prosperity and order to the school. Henry was now head of Evans's house, and a very bad

head he made, from the prig point of view, for he actually had never been known to set any one an imposition, and was, to say the least of it, lax and undignified in his own behaviour.

"I wonder you haven't more sense," Beau would say, "of the duties of your position."

"Don't be a fool," was the usual reply; "no one shall ever induce me to play the master, or prefect, or whatever you call it, over the other fellows. I like them too well. Why, you know, for all you stick yourself up so, you're only one of them!"

And the result of this was that Henry was a great favourite in the house, and no fags did their work so well as his did. He always made a point of securing for himself any one whose position, so far as football or cricket went, entitled him to consideration, although he was not high enough in

school to avoid being a fag. Such fags as this it was ever the joy of the ideal prig in the sixth form to lord it over. Henry, on the other hand, devised a method of far different treatment; for, having secured his distinguished fag, he made him into what he called his "Saturday-night fag," and his only duty was to act as overseer, take care that the others did their work properly, and arrange the supper on Saturday nights. This work was always gladly and efficiently done. For the rest, Henry's fags never hesitated to ask him to help them over difficulties in their lessons, and many a time did an unconscious master mark "V. G." to a line in their Latin verses which owed its origin to their good-natured patron.

Bertrand was still at the school, and high up in the sixth, too. He occupied a study next to the one where Tom Elliott and a

boy named Stevenson were located. It must be noted that members of the sixth rejoiced in the solitary grandeur of each having a whole study to himself. Now the temper of Bertrand had not improved with age, and the desire to "draw" him was not one whit diminished by his having attained to a position of authority. On the contrary, the additional spice of danger lent a fresh charm to such enterprises. Tom and Henry, too, it must be confessed, had now for some time been in the habit of keeping their favourite terriers in the town, contrary to all rule and precedent. A vendor of tarts and other comestibles had the charge of the precious animals. His name was Day, and his face was very familiar to all in the school, as he was constantly to be seen with his hand-cart of delicacies in the Close and elsewhere. Ah! if those who bought and ate of his goods had only known the inner

secrets! At the somewhat squalid abode of Day that pastry was made: at that same abode the dogs resided, each chained to its own tub around the small backyard, or actually in the minute outhouse where the paste was rolled by Day himself. On the shelves in this outhouse were ranged pots of jam and of mange ointment, butter and flea-soap in artistic confusion; and between the dressing of a dog for mange, and the manipulation of pastry into a jam-tart, Day recognized no sufficiently wide distinction to entail the necessity of washing his hands.

Sometimes the boys would smuggle a terrier into the house, and it was on one of these occasions that Tom and Stevenson were sitting over their supper and feeding to an inordinate extent old Jim, a canine gentleman of great renown in the rat-pit.

It so chanced that Jim began to evince

signs of suspicion that game was on foot or in the vicinity. He trotted busily round the little room, snuffed profoundly in the corners, and finally stopped at one of them, slightly scratched the carpet, looked appealingly at his master, and then with a small whimper stood over the place, his eyes eager and expectant, and his stern moving tremulously.

"It's any odds there's a rat somewhere near him," said Tom.

"What sport if we could only get to it!" said Stevenson.

"Well, we can try, at any rate; so here goes," and Tom proceeded to pull back the carpet, to the intense excitement of Jim, and finding a couple of the boards quite short there, and rather loose, he without more ado tore them up, whereupon the dog bolted down through the aperture, seemed to fall a few feet, and then they could

hear him worrying and skurrying about below.

All this was very fine, but they could not see what was going on; and, what was more, they couldn't get Jim out when he had completed his operations on the enemy. This was a regular puzzle; and while they were meditating, Henry came in. They had not the smallest scruple in consulting him on the matter, though he was the head of the house, and his imagination being quicker than theirs, he soon devised an expedient.

"Just go and ask Arbuthnot to come here," said he; and Stevenson went off to summon the small, confidential fag who rejoiced in that name.

When he arrived, he at once expressed himself willing and able to carry out Henry's suggestion, which was that he should go down through the small hole in the floor

and bring out the dog. He had, indeed, no difficulty whatever in doing so, for the hole proved quite large enough to admit his minute body, and the ground was only about four feet below, after all. A candle was handed down to him, and he quickly captured old Jim, whom he lifted up to his friends above. After this, Arbuthnot turned round to examine the place, and found, to begin with, that the dog had slain two rats, which he also threw into the study, and then, in looking for the rat-holes, with a view to future proceedings, he discovered that one half-brick was altogether gone out of the partition-wall which divided Tom's and Stevenson's from Bertrand's study. This wall was only one brick thick, so, of course, there was a hole completely through it, and by this the surviving rats seemed to have bolted and escaped under Bertrand's study.

On hearing of this an idea flashed across Henry. "What capital sport it would be to frighten old Bertrand!" he exclaimed.

"How, how?" asked the others.

"Why, don't you see, if we give Arbuthnot a broom-handle down there, he can put it through the hole, and tap under Bertrand's floor."

"Capital!" cried Tom; "but suppose some one came in here and found what was going on?"

"Why, there's nothing to prevent us putting those two boards down, and shoving the carpet over them as if nothing had happened. We'll give him a rug down there to lie on, and he's got a candle, so he'll be all right; and, I say, let's make him a long paper funnel, which he can stick into the hole, and groan through it."

The nefarious project was soon arranged, and the study-floor being readjusted beyond

all suspicion, the entertainment commenced. Words would but poorly avail to describe the consequences—how Bertrand, with awe-struck countenance, rushed in to where the conspirators sat, to tell them of the knocking and groans beneath the floor; how they, in all apparent good faith, went with him to his haunted apartment, leaving their own study-door wide open, so that any one could see into it; how they heard and trembled with suppressed laughter.

Bertrand nearly jumped out of his skin at each knock which came under his feet, and the hollow and death-like groans sounded remarkably horrible.

"My dear Bertrand," cried Henry, "it's no use being frightened; we must tear up your floor and see what it is!"

"Yes, yes; thank you so much," gasped the tremulous youth.

Thereupon, almost bursting with laughter, the three set to work to push Bertrand's

furniture on one side, pull back the carpet, and tear up the loosest of the boards. Arbuthnot had been told to expect some such occurrence, and of course ceased from his ghostly proceedings.

"As I live, there is nothing here!" exclaimed Henry, holding a candle down below the floor and peering underneath.

"Are you quite sure?" asked Tom.

"Quite. Look for yourself."

Tom peered down into the dread abyss, and also announced that there was nothing.

Bertrand seemed stupefied with alarm, and our friends set about restoring the floor. They had just bestowed the carpet neatly in its place and re-arranged the furniture, Bertrand occasionally murmuring his thanks, when tap, tap, came the supernatural sounds once more, followed by a melancholy moan.

"Obstupui, steterantque comæ, vox faucibus hæsit."

So might Bertrand have said, so did the others pretend.

It is needless to describe the matter further. It was carried out night after night with fresh elaborations. Bertrand was given another study; the haunted one was deserted, and the secret of the ghost was never discovered. In vain did the old house butler come with jaunty and fearless air to set the matter right. The first tap under his feet quite changed his complexion. "Ooh! I say, you know!" he cried; and then when he, too, had examined under the floor and found nothing—for Arbuthnot on such occasions always placed his rug over the secret aperture to hide his light—and when after such fruitless examination the ghost immediately resumed its noises the butler turned and fled.

The masters, too, could make no better of it; and as for the boys in general, a

stage was soon reached when they declared they heard the ghost at midnight and other seasons, when the real authors well knew that the ghost was in bed, fast asleep.

Very wicked to do such things, some one will say, most dangerous—people have become gibbering maniacs through foolish jokes of the kind. Well, it must be remembered that the ghost in question originated somewhat spontaneously, with no very fixed or deep design. It grew upon its authors in a manner which they never anticipated, and, after all, it did no one any harm, while it is needless to say that it afforded them huge sport in many of its phases.

About this time it happened that Miss D'Aguilar brought her two charges, Dorothy Desanges and Lady Mary Gainsborough, to Mugby for a few days' visit. They had

for a long time been anxious to see the school about which the boys told them so much, and in consequence this small and unpretentious expedition was organized. Rooms were taken at the Dragon Hotel, and very soon the girls were viewing in some astonishment all that was to be seen, from the many and various boys walking with no little swagger arm-in-arm by twos and threes all over the town, to the seething and excited masses engaged in Big Side football.

The girls were getting on in point of years by this time. Sixteen or thereabouts was the age credited to each, but Lady Mary might have been a year or two the elder, for she had apparently passed the gawky stage during which girlhood is so terrible ; while Dorothy, on the other hand, being altogether of larger frame, was now just at her worst, though the beautiful,

intelligent brown eyes, the delicate yet firmly expressed features, and the pleasant glow of health, were there to relieve the angularities of the picture. Miss D'Aguilar was pretty much the same as ever. At her time of life a few years make no great difference. Perhaps her temperament was a little more acidulated, but she was not such a very terrible chaperon after all.

What ordeals had to be gone through in the shape of mid-day dinners with some masters, ponderous breakfasts with others, and actual dinners with a few to which Henry, Beau, and occasionally Tom were invited to meet their friends! So stiff and formal those repasts were; so utterly unlike anything to be seen elsewhere than at school!

Something there is about female society breaking in upon the stern masculine discipline of school routine, which is surpass-

ingly delightful, and the boys, except upon the rigid occasions just referred to, were beyond measure pleased with the advent of Miss D'Aguilar and the fair little ladies.

Till then they had regarded Mary and Dorothy, if not with the contempt bred of familiarity, at least with the indifference produced by custom. Now Tom began to find himself quite charmed to be with Mary, and as for Beau and Henry, they would have infallibly quarrelled about Dorothy but that she liked Henry so much the better of the two, and so plainly showed it, that there was really no excuse for rivalry.

A sensible little woman was Dorothy; almost patronizing, so far as Henry was concerned; questioned him on his studies, and ridiculed the idea of his being second in the school without having any know-

ledge of modern languages, and little or none of mathematics.

"Latin and Greek—where's the good of Latin and Greek?" she would ask. Then Henry would try to explain that the study of the dead languages was valuable as a mental exercise, just as the use of dumb-bells developed the muscles of the body—"though," as he added, "dumb-bells and dead languages are alike useless in themselves."

"Seems to me you might find plenty of subjects to exercise both your mind, as you call it, and your body on, without singling out what you admit are useless."

And then Henry would change the subject, with a thought perhaps that new countries and dead languages were not altogether in keeping with one another. "'Tis a pity she's an American!" he would say to himself.

Mary and Tom behaved very badly in Miss D'Aguilar's eyes. There was far too much laughing, too much inclination to play jokes; and once she overheard them chaffing the august Beau almost to madness at his being obliged to always keep with her, as Dorothy was monopolized by Henry. Miss D'Aguilar was fain to tolerate all this, but she marked with increasing displeasure the way in which Mary and Tom took frequent opportunities of separating themselves from her charge.

Beau seized an opportunity of scoring off Henry one day, while they were all in the Close watching a House match at football. Dorothy chanced to say to him, "Who is that good-looking boy?" indicating none other than our old friend Bertrand, whose Spanish blood had certainly given him a face which in the eyes of very young ladies might be accounted handsome.

"Oh! his name's Bertrand; an awfully jolly fellow; he'd be so glad if I might introduce him to you."

"Do, by all means," said Dorothy, just a little pleased to see an expression of annoyance on Henry's face as he stood by.

Bertrand was consequently introduced, and, being well able to acquit himself favourably in matters of small talk, engaged the attention of the young lady for upwards of an hour; while Henry fretted and fumed inwardly, and Beau chuckled with ill-concealed triumph. It was most annoying for the enamoured swain to hear Bertrand introduced to Miss D'Aguilar, and actually asked by her to come to breakfast next morning.

"That beast, Bertrand, of all fellows in the world!" ejaculated Henry. "I must see if I can't take him down in the run to-morrow, and she'll be there to see us come in."

It was the great "Wick" run, which was fixed for this date: thirteen miles in distance, eight across country, and the last five along the road; not to be accomplished without some effort and a reasonable proportion of stamina. Henry had never, until a few weeks back, been possessed of an idea that he could run. Indeed, some five years before he had tried, and failed miserably. But he had, at last, been persuaded by Tom to make another attempt, and in a ten-mile House run had finished fourth. This was no great performance, but he was conscious of having felt so fresh at the end that he was sure he could have done much better had he had more confidence in himself.

Now Bertrand was a great runner, though inferior at all other athletic sports. He had come in first for the "Wick" the year previous, and it was fully expected he

would do so this time. It was somewhat a rash and wild idea for Henry to select this method of taking him down: nevertheless this is what came of it:—

The start was made about three o'clock in the afternoon, and the ladies were there to witness it. No mere "House run" was it, in which all the "hounds" keep together until within a certain distance from home, when the "spurt," as it is called, commences, and there is from that point a race;—no, on this occasion the affair is a race from the start, and each one does the best he can in his own interest. Away went the two hares, and then came the awful interval of ten minutes before the hounds could be despatched in pursuit. It does not fall to the lot of every one to run long-distance races, or go in for hare and hounds' business; consequently every one cannot realize the peculiarly objection-

able sensation of waiting for the start. Horrid qualms are felt, and anything but pleasure seems to be prevalent. Luckily this all vanishes when once you are off, but it is easier in the future to understand why horses in some cases display such an objection to a race-course. But the time was up at last; the hounds, some twenty in number, started amid a buzz of excitement, and were soon lost to view. It was not for some while that Henry began to feel confident. The first half-mile was hard work, and he thought, for a moment, that he was going to be out of it; but after that he began to settle down, he got his wind all right, and with an easy stride kept moving along in the vicinity of Bertrand, whom he knew to be his most formidable opponent.

The afternoon was delightfully cool, fresh, and clear—a spring day of the best

sort—and the "Wick" run lay over some of the most beautiful country from an agricultural point of view. Henry had ample time to look around him and admire the many evidences of clean intelligent farming which he passed by, and to think with wistful pleasure of the likely-looking coverts, stationed here and there, from which he had seen more than one fox go away ere now, and many a good run commence. Even on foot, he thought, fox-hunting is better than any other sport.

But the business is now growing more serious: some three miles have been traversed at a smartish pace, broken only by the short delays entailed by the fences. Already some of the hounds are tailing off, and two or three greasy fallow fields, of considerable dimensions and all on the collar, are very productive of bellows to mend. Henry again feels very sinkingly

inclined, and looks in despair at Bertrand, who seems cool and collected, while some half-dozen others are going well also; but an opportune stretch of sound turf renovates him, and once more he feels at his ease. So they went on, and so they emerged at last from the country upon the road, five miles from home. Now on this good-going the pace quickens, and the contest begins in good earnest. Henry sticks to Bertrand, who is lying well up in front, and he is surprised to find that ere long they two begin to draw away from the rest, while he himself is confident in his powers to do a good deal more if necessary.

Just ten yards or so behind Bertrand, he finds himself going more and more easily; but he wisely does not trust himself to go to the front, for his experience of pace is *nil*, while Bertrand is an old hand at the business. Bertrand himself, who

never dreamed of danger from Henry, began to feel alarmed when within two miles from home he still heard the steady footfalls behind him, and was conscious that his efforts to shake off the pursuer were unavailing as yet. Still worse was it when at the mile-post Henry came right up to him, seemingly full of go, while he himself began to feel a bit weakly and uncertain.

"Heavens!" thought he, "am I going to be beaten by Gainsborough, who has never run but once before, and then only fourth?" A very short distance more proved to him that he was indeed going to be beaten, unless he could induce his opponent to stop; and suddenly he, for the first time, realized the pace at which they had been going, when, on turning a bend in the road, they came full in view of one of the hares whom they had almost caught.

"I say, Gainsborough," said Bertrand, as calmly as he could, "I don't care about racing if you don't. Shall we run together to the finish?"

For a moment Henry's easy nature and instinctive love of settling things without trouble very nearly made him agree to this proposal, for he himself was feeling pretty well done now; but then came the thought of Dorothy, and this resolved him.

"No, no, old man, we'll have it out while we are about it," he answered, and forthwith began to slowly forge ahead, for there was not half a mile to go now, and they were close on the town.

Bertrand, to do him justice, struggled on very gamely, and was by no means disposed of as yet; but they had now entered the town and were racing away down Morton Street, which extends in a straight line right through the place, and at an ap-

pointed lamp-post in which the finish of the "Wick" is.

But some four hundred yards to go now, and Henry has caught and passed the hindmost hare—a great triumph in itself; still he hears Bertrand pounding along behind, and is terribly afraid that even yet he may fail. People applaud as they pass along, but he scarcely hears them. Now, however, he marks white dresses fluttering in the distance. There they are, there SHE is!

No hope for Bertrand now; for the mind, sentiment, heart, imagination, or whatever you call it, has a wondrous power over the body. That sight has given Henry a double portion of vigour. Away he goes leaving Bertrand vainly struggling along. Nearer comes the vision which has inspired him. Now the faces can be plainly noticed. There is any amount of applause, but he

heeds it not. He sees but the one face amid all the others as he passes swiftly along. He marks that the brown eyes are aglow with pleasure and excitement, that she is waving a handkerchief—though why the female mind is accustomed to exuberate into handkerchief waving we have never understood,—that she is, in fact, obviously glad; and then he has passed the final lamp-post thirty seconds ahead of Bertrand, having done the thirteen miles in one hour twenty-seven minutes, and his legs stiffen after he has stood for a moment; he cannot walk straight, but reels about drunkenly; he tries to address her with nonchalance, as if he were not in the least beat, but it is of no use. "Here, Henry, take a pull at this," says Tom, who is there with the ladies, producing a surreptitious whisky-flask, and Henry drinks with profit. He is in good condition, and soon recovers.

"Oh, Henry, how foolish of you to run like that! And yet I *was* so glad to see you beat the others. I hope you'll always beat everybody in everything!" This was a pretty speech for a young lady to make, but it was dictated by the mere impulse of the moment, without any thought that it was likely to act as a motive power at a future time.

Nevertheless, that kindly-expressed hope of hers did have a marked effect on Henry. It was just one of those little things in which women can, if they will, do so much good. After Miss D'Aguilar had brought the visit to a conclusion, he still thought of those words, and under their influence he determined to wind up his school career by "beating everybody." The yearly exhibitions were competed for, of course, that summer, and he would get the first of them. In this resolution he was, perhaps,

a little aided by his dislike for the masters. They had long since looked on him as a black sheep, and scoffed at the very idea of his getting an exhibition. Beau and sundry other of their pet pupils, they assiduously coached and prepared for the coming fray.

Henry did his reading unaided, except by his fixed purpose. He got the first exhibition easily, while Beau had to put up with the fifth, and he left the school amid a blaze of triumph and a tumult of pedantic wrath and priggish indignation.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The blossom of the flying terms."—*Anon.*

And now we are at Dervorguilla College, Oxford, that seat of learning where men are taught by all means to be pedants, and prevented, if it be possible, from getting into any sort of touch with the world. Ah! it will never be known how much harm has been done by the poor, narrow-minded creatures, called dons, who are set to mould the mind of the youth of this country. Many a bright nature, capable of expanding into something of usefulness, has been cramped and confined into the grooves of scholastic discipline till the power of original thought is gone, the

vigour of flickering genius died out, and the man who graduates in the highest honours, some time thereafter meets you in the street, and begs you to lend him half-a-crown. This is not an overdrawn picture; it is from life. How often do you hear people speculating on what becomes of the "first-class" men! Well, they *do* sometimes come down to walking shoeless in the street.

Beau, Henry, and Tom have all gone to Dervorguilla. They have interviewed the master, who has received them with his terrible meaningless silence, looking the while at nothing, and driving them in sheer despair to almost say something about the weather. He has dismissed them with his stereotyped commonplace, "I will not detain you any longer," and they have settled down in their various rooms in the college. What a business

that settling down is; and how profitable to the scouts, who order the "fresher" vastly more of everything than he requires, and profit accordingly in perquisites!

Beau, at an early period, was taken up by the master, who had indisputable tuft-hunting proclivities. So the evil communications of the Mugby masters were in some sort continued. To sit at the feet of this modern Gamaliel; to hear him lecture on Plato, and emasculate matters of religious belief—this was about the worst thing the young Bolingbroke could have done, but fortune seemed ever to guide him in this direction, and he was soon known as the master's especial favourite.

Henry and Tom, on the other hand, were by no means of the Dervorguilla sort. Moreover, they gave way not a little to the impulses which seize on all youngsters with any "go" in them when first they

are emancipated from school, and turned loose in a university. It is a most perilous period, the contrast is so great. At school you are not allowed to obtain anything on credit; at a university, if your parents are known, your credit is practically unlimited. The freshman may go into any shop in Oxford and order whatever he likes to be sent to his rooms, and he won't be bothered to pay for two or three years. Can any one be surprised, under these circumstances, that the boys run up monstrous bills without really being aware of it? The position is one in which they never ought to be placed, and there is but one remedy for the evil, which is not to give the tradesman the benefit of the doubt on the question of minority—for no one likes to evade a debt on such a plea—but to enact that, in all cases of credit given at the universities it shall be

necessary for the creditor to prove not only the debt, but that the debtor was of age. In other words, let the presumption be that an undergraduate is a minor, and make it impossible for a tradesman to recover against him without proving him to be of age.

In the cases with which we are dealing it mattered little to Henry and Beau what amount of debt they incurred, for the duke was as rich as Crœsus; but Tom was in a very different position, and at the same time, it never occurred to him to act differently from his cousins; who thinks much of the future, at the age of nineteen?

It would be of small avail to narrate the daily routine of lectures—most of them absolutely useless. Yes, useless, for we are prepared to maintain that an hour's reading does vastly more good to any one than the average lecture. We never knew but

one man capable of lecturing with effect, and that was Mr. Dendy, of University College, and he was a hunting man, which naturally made him a sensible being.

Then the boating, what a business it is! and how mistaken are they who think the boating man to be outside the pale of the reading fraternity! In point of fact boating men habitually read, and are by nature priggish—by no means broad, solid English characters as imaginative persons picture them. Every one goes in for boating at first, and is assiduously coached by the best men in his college if he has any form about him at all, but the second term sees a considerable weeding out of those who have had enough of it. To become a genuine boating man, you must be prepared to give up every afternoon that ever is, and of our friends, Beau alone seemed disposed to do this.

Those were very happy days all the same. Tom and Henry very soon made the acquaintance of Charlie Symonds, Tollit, and other livery-stable keepers, and for them it early became apparent hunting and not rowing was the sport. A horrid thing this according to all principles which have ever regulated Dervorguilla, where a man who reads or gets a first class may commit any atrocity in the way of drink or otherwise, except that he must not touch horseflesh. Horseflesh is abominable, and he who meddles with it is lost.

Herein is no exaggeration. An instance of it may be readily given. A certain very fleshy poet, whom we will call Jones, was much affected by the master, despite most objectionable proclivities. It so happened that Henry was asked to breakfast with the master, to meet this man, and in

an unwary moment invited him to lunch. The poet, Jones, went to lunch with Henry, and there was, naturally, drink on the table. To this the poet helped himself assiduously, and presently became utterly intoxicated, lapsing into a senseless state and an easy chair. It was hours before he could be roused, and then he only staggered across the quadrangle in time for the master's dinner. His horrid condition was in no way imputed as a fault to him, but Henry was "gated" for the rest of term.

Now let it not be thought that Henry and Tom were wholly given to horses. The former had not forgotten the running track, and the latter was as keen as ever after cricket, but boating was quite too monotonous for such free spirits. They were much given also to dogs, to wit fox terriers, and these they kept with the

Boots of the Mitre Hotel, that most rare place, where the floor is as the billows on a rolling sea, so much have some of the walls subsided. The unwary person who dines there, not knowing of this peculiarity, is apt to be much astonished when he gets up and staggers into a corner of the room. But oh, those dogs, those dogs! What follies do they lead youth into! What rat worryings there were at Butler's; what cat hunts in college at midnight; what cruelty and bloodshed is perpetrated! Take, for instance, a day when the Boots tells them of a man at Islip who has caught a wild badger. Now these boys are not of sanguinary disposition, still they are at once on fire to go to Islip. "I'll tell you what," says Tom, "we'll buy the badger and give him a fair chance. Turn him down in his own country, and then run him by scent." This

seemed right enough, and off they drove —Beau and one or two others with them this time—to Islip; buy the badger for thirty shillings from the man there, then Tom shoulders it in a sack and starts off across country, while Henry runs a long, circuitous drag with the badger's bedding, meeting Tom at an appointed spot, when they turn down the badger, which seems very far from wild, but at length is constrained to amble away through the next hedge and is lost to view. Then the two return on the line of the drag, and presently they see the terriers coming, followed at intervals by Beau and the others; very pretty sport so far, and now on they go to where the drag was lifted and the badger turned down, so there is a slight check; then on again and through that fence: over they go and would you believe it? The idiot badger has never stirred

away at all, and there they are all at him. Well, they worry the badger in due course, and somehow the thing isn't satisfactory. The blame is laid on the badger.

To all appearance, through times such as these, there was not the slightest probability of Henry doing much good in the present or future. So utterly callous did he appear to all his scholastic interests, that on the day when he ought to have entered for "smalls," he chose rather to go to Birmingham dog show, where, be it noted, the stupidity of Conservatism in its worst sense is yearly shown; and from thence he did not return till somewhere about eleven o'clock. The porter informed him on his entrance into college that the master wished to see him forthwith, and he proceeded to Tom's rooms to consult.

Now it so chanced on the previous night

there had been a regular orgy in college—a "bump supper" being on the way; the crowd of people outside had been pelted with various missiles from Henry's window, and water was poured on the head of the proctor, who inopportunely intervened. Fireworks were let off in the quadrangle subsequently, and a booby trap of flour set for the dean, who was drawn from his room by a maroon being exploded just outside his door. As a result of all this, a "common room" assembled next day, and Henry was summoned before it. Of course he did not come, being at Birmingham, and the awful tribunal, having sat for some hours, disbanded in high dudgeon. The master was left to deal with the offender.

The case seemed serious indeed. "You will certainly be sent down for the term," said Tom.

With this pleasant prophecy, Henry went to see the master.

That cherubic man was seated at his writing-table, and on Henry's entrance, gazed at him a moment, but said nothing, and to all appearance looked at nothing. Thus they remained for what seemed an awfully long time; then the master looked up.

"Ah, Lord Henry, I sent for you. I think your tutor has complained you do not attend lectures as you should." Henry muttered some excuse; and there was again an utter silence. At last it dawned on him that it might be possible to escape, so he begun to back out of the room. Just as he thought he was safely out of it, the master again looked up. "There is something else I have to say to you." "Now," thought Henry, "it's coming." But again there was silence,

and at last the great interpreter of Plato gazed on him without any apparent recognition, and remarked, "I will not detain you any longer!"

Henry murmured "good evening," and departed; nor did he ever hear another word about this matter.

"It's an ill wind that blows no one any good," said Tom, when he heard what had happened; "and you may thank your stars the old fellow had addled his head with Plato till he couldn't think about you."

CHAPTER IX.

"A college joke to cure the dumps."
Cassinus and Peter.

And so the Oxford days go on, very careless, very happy, Beau alone of our three friends being oppressed by any sense of the importance of anything, and in his case his own importance and that of the Master are the only items of any moment.

To Henry, life is one dazzle of amusement, nothing serious in it. He has the power to think, and does think a bit sometimes, even lets fancies pass before him of a stronger, sterner existence when he may rise to position entailing weighty duties. Yes, there was in him even now a con-

sciousness of something above his fellows. No one has ever been mistaken that has experienced this. Many of course there are, shallow-witted fools, who fancy themselves immensely, from sheer conceit. To these there is apt to come a rude awakening, though if they be thick-hided enough to endure the laughter of the world for a long time, even they are apt to attain some measure of success through the importunacy of their self-assertiveness.

It is a very different case, however, with your true genius. That can never be mistaken. Ah! the ecstasy of the feeling when at some chance time, probably near midnight, the intellect grows bright and brighter, and the divine spark kindles what was dull before. The man knows himself at last, and the power that is in him, be it for never so short a time. Such are the first dawnings of innate

greatness, and the cultured being of a later day will never forget these strange wild flashes.

It is a little hard to understand how such things can be, and how trifling causes may lead up to such great effects. It would seem incredible, for instance, that "Slap's" band at Oxford should ever affect a man very deeply, but in Henry's case, perhaps the first time he ever thought seriously about anything was one night when he was lying awake, and the band, to whom he had always been a good customer, took upon themselves to serenade him as they were returning from playing at a dance. Doubtless they were well primed with drink; at least, they played as if such were the case, and their selection was the John Peel Galop. In the most wild and impassioned fashion did they give this, and to Henry, who loved

this dear old song—and who does not?—it acted as the most extraordinary revelation. His whole soul seemed on fire; a grand excitement took possession of him, and he felt for awhile capable of any effort which circumstances might demand. A curious thing, truly; but who has not been strangely moved at times by a few notes of old music, which seem to call him back to strange or long-forgotten thoughts, and to suggest possibilities never till then contemplated?

We are not all possessed of such delicate sensibilities as Henry. Tom, for instance, would have been apt to pour water on "Slap" for disturbing him at that hour. Beau would have affected to despise the quality of the music.

Yet what is a bright particular flash or two here and there? Nothing, positively nothing for the present. Henry floats

along with as much levity as ever, treats existence as if it were a vast joke, and hardly dreams of solid work. Letters from home give all sorts of advice, and Dorothy is an excellent correspondent; but nothing produces much effect. Perhaps it is better so for the present.

Look now at the assembled debaters in the "Union." Observe the pompous self-importance of the president. Does he not now think himself a heaven-born statesman? Who is he, say you? Well, no one exactly knows; but he is of American origin, we are told, and he is noticeable for the length of his hair. Is the man clever? Oh, decidedly;—so at least nine out of ten will answer; but the tenth may tell you his position is gained rather by conceit, cheek, and pushing power, than by any real worth. But surely this is blasphemy of a president of the "Union,"

and such a president as Pertinax Prigsby! Listen to his domineering eloquence. He may be shaky in his facts really, but who could ever suspect it, when he dilates on them with such confidence? A time may come when in a more cold-blooded assembly he will be subjected to the ruthless showing up which errors deserve, but at present he talks on, magnificent, unrivalled.

"Grand, isn't it?" said Beau to Henry, one night, after they had listened to one of Prigsby's most elaborate speeches.

"Inflated twaddle, otherwise rot," answered Henry.

"What! Do you mean to say you don't admire his eloquence? True, he is a Conservative, and, between ourselves, I don't think intellect has any scope except in Radicalism, but you must allow the man is a born orator?"

"An orator," said Henry. "What is an orator?"

"A man who can talk."

"Exactly, a man who can talk; the very most dangerous faculty a man can possess, the faculty of clothing ignorance, falsehood, and unrealities in showy words so as to deceive the people. I tell you this Prigsby is a humbug, and you'll find it so some day."

"On the contrary," said Beau rather nettled, "I am convinced that he will lead the Conservative party; he is the very man to do it."

"Then heaven help the Conservative party!" cried Henry, "and heaven help any party who makes a leader of a windbag; why, I would make a better speech than Prigsby myself—maybe it wouldn't sound so well, but it would read better."

"Oh, now you're talking nonsense! Fancy you making a speech!" and Beau laughed heartily.

Henry joined in the laugh, for on second

thoughts it did seem absurd. "No, I don't think I'm an orator. He may have the field to himself as far as I am concerned."

But he little knew what the future had in store for him.

No, there was no thought of fame in Henry just then. Even plain, honest Tom Elliott had, perhaps, higher aspirations. Tom would think sometimes of possible government appointments. Less brilliant men than he had ere now been Under-secretaries of State. Who could tell what might happen? Henry would laugh at this, and call him an "old fool," and Tom would shut up and come out for a ride or whatever sport might be on the way.

The innocent pastimes of flying from the proctors, drawing the dons, hunting with Lord Macclesfield, most rare old

sportsman, or with Tom Duffield and the old Berkshire;—ah, what language can the said Tom use! Never shall we forget hearing him, when he had just been immersed in a brook, and was lying on the bank with his feet stuck up in the air to run the water out of his boots; or again on the same day when his *fourth* horse galloped right into another brook with him. Plenty of other good hunting was there,—the Bicester, the Heythrop, with Mr. Hall not then known to political fame, and others. These innocent pastimes were admirable, but the association with a lot of Christ Church men introduced "Nap," and "unlimited loo," and the attendant troubles.

At a college like Christ Church, where a man of good family is put in front at once, and nine times out of ten hasn't the self-restraint to avoid expenses if he isn't

rich, one constantly sees silly youths gambling vastly and paying in I.O.U.'s of the most utterly worthless character. This is all very well among themselves, but the sons of wealthy *parvenus*, who are sent to Christ Church for the appearance of the thing, are well provided with funds. These pay cash, and therefore the price of their gaming with more aristocratic associates is by no means light to them. They never receive if they win; they pay when they lose.

It matters little, perhaps, to the youth who pleases his silly vanity by a lavish display of riches, but it is decidedly harmful to the recipients. Talking of lavish display, look at John Gould, of Christ Church, the ironmaster's son. He comes up to Beau, for instance. "Oh, I say, Bolingbroke; come and have a chop with me at the Randolph to-night."

Beau consents, and goes, expecting a little dinner, but finds, to his astonishment, the whole big coffee-room laid out for one enormous repast, and about 150 guests, all the delicacies of the season, and the best available wines. He meets his host, and says, "Well, Gould, you *are* coming it strong!" To which the reply, "Oh, I don't know, I've been doing this twice a week since term began; but it doesn't quite satisfy me, I think I must have some better wine than that hotel for the future."

And for the next few weeks this sort of thing continues, the most expensive vintage wines being bought by Gould, and corkage paid on them at the hotel. This is no exaggerated picture; and there is no knowing to what lengths such extravagance might have been carried, had not the Christ Church dons suddenly fulmi-

nated against Gould, and sent him down.

This dinner is mentioned here, because it was in the early morning, after it, that Beau and Henry encountered a newsboy yelling, "Terrible affray at Bolingbroke Park, awful bloodshed!"

Hastily buying the paper, they glance in terrible anxiety over its contents, but there was only a brief telegram:—

"A poaching affray is said to have taken place in Countryholm Park last night. No details are yet to hand, but it is feared the consequences were very serious."

CHAPTER X.

"Confusion now hath made his masterpiece ;
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed Temple, and stole thence
The life of the building." *Shakespeare.*

In the farm-house of John Wilkinson, the evening before the last record of the preceding chapter, there were old Peter Stobbs, the ex-gamekeeper, and his daughter Polly, of whom we have heard before. They had walked over to spend a friendly evening, and if Polly expected that one of the young men would be pleased to see her, why, there is small wonder.

But young John Wilkinson, whom she had, like a wayward woman, taken a fancy to, was not there, though Charles did the

best he could to make himself agreeable. Indeed he was desperately fond of this pretty country maiden; but, being altogether less pretentious than his brother, had failed to attract her.

In the big kitchen, with its stone floor and raftered roof, a gun or two hanging therefrom, not unmixed with sides of bacon and hams, the farm men were finishing their suppers, and chatting in their slow, sententious fashion over the day's doings. The light of the candles was pleasantly dusk, and the big shadows fell across the floor in a manner suggestive of repose.

"Yes," said old Tom Jackson, who had worked on the farm for twenty-five years, "I can't say as things is what they was. Folks is sort of unpleasant like one to t'other, and there's no satisfyin' no one."

"That's truth," interposed a younger man, "and seems to me there's some reason

in it. Why, Mr. Haspland—Lord, he do talk beautiful!—he says, says he, 'the land for the people,' he says."

"He says!" ejaculated old Tom, "Who's 'e when 'e's at home? You tak' an old man's advice, Jem, and don't you listen to 'im, nor any like 'im. 'Tain't no good, I say. A man as does an honest day's work'll always be happy, and I'm d——d if you'll be if you goes gallivantin' after 'im."

"Oh, I don't think nought about 'im," says Jem, half abashed. "What mud 'e know about farming? but our young John Wilkinson; lor! how changed he is since he got going to Haspland's lectors; and then as for Parson's wife—!"

Jem paused, unable to express his thoughts.

"Well," said the old man, "'tain't for you and me to bother our heads about that. We've got a good master, and 'e's got a

good landlord, and that there Haspland may preach 'isself speechless afore I'll ever take any notice of him." And with that, old Tom lapsed into dignified silence.

Meanwhile, in the parlour, old Peter and John Wilkinson were enjoying a game at "odd trick," not to mention discreet potations of whisky-and-water. The stakes were small, but the interest keen, and good Mrs. Wilkinson looked on eagerly.

Charles and Polly sat on the sofa, she not very well pleased with her companion; he rather shy and uncouth, but very anxious to please.

"Now, where do you really suppose John is?" asked she.

"Can't say; that is, he didn't tell me; but he's been queer lately, and hasn't let me know much about him."

"Queer! What do you mean by saying he's queer? He's a lot improved in sense and manners, if that's queer!

"No; but he's taken up, like, with them people as says we're all wrong side up. You know what I mean."

"Indeed, I don't!" and Polly looked half indignant.

"Well! he thinks as he's a right to be as good as the duke, and he never goes near church, and—"

"Oh! I see you're jealous of him, and so you talk against him."

Poor Charles looks very downcast at this, and becomes sheepishly silent.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughs old Wilkinson, "I knew I'd win. What, Peter, old man, you've clean forgotten how to play! Mix him another drink, Missis—then he's bound to try and do better!"

So they played on a bit, and whether it was the whisky or the turn of luck, old Peter Stobbs won back all he had lost; and meanwhile Polly was carrying on a not altogether unpleasant conversation with

Charles. Ah! ye young ladies who like not commonplace flirtations—skip over this. We are Tories, you know, and, what is more, we write from knowledge. There is a distinction, perhaps, but no difference in the affections of all well-meaning people.

But "Bless my soul!" says old Peter, "it's nigh hand one o'clock; we must be going home, John, and thank you kindly for a pleasant night. Polly, lass, you look sleepy like; are you ready? Well then, good night, neighbour, good night; there's a bright moon, and we'll easy see our way home."

"Be sure," said Charles, as he shook hands impressively with Polly, "to go straight by the park pathway; it's far away the easiest and the safest." "Safest?" said she, "What do you mean?" "Oh, I don't know, it's only a fancy!"

Polly and her father walked briskly along

in the clear moonlight night, not but what the old man had had quite as much as was good for him. The charm of moonlight in the country, or indeed anywhere, is wonderful, and as they trudged over the verdant pathways and climbed the rustic styles, they would have been dense, indeed, had they not observed the pleasant beauty of midnight nature, and all the forces which draw out the soul into communion, where it is possible, with the higher powers. It is indeed, a matter of terrible doubt to all who have ever been able to think how far they can gain touch with the Infinite. They can, perhaps, never do it; but even to this poor old man and his daughter walking along in the calm moonlight night something of the divine *afflatus* came—something of the thought that words can never express, and which we will veil in solemn silence accordingly; for we

have entered—so best—into their very hearts.

They step along, saying little, when suddenly, after passing a gateway on the far side of which is the home cover of the castle, they are aroused by the noise of several pheasants flying over them in the direction of that cover.

Old Peter is at once on the alert. "There's something up there, Polly, my lass," says he. "See! there's another bird, and another, and another! them chaps from the town or some one's after no good in the Black Plantation. 'Taint for me to interfere now, but I can't abide to see the duke robbed. Come on, lass, come on," and as another pheasant whistled over their heads, old Peter hurried Polly off right to the left, down hill, and across one or two nasty gaps to the "Black Plantation," which was not over four

hundred yards away—a big dense wood, with tall larch trees, where pheasants were glad to roost in the heart of the valley.

Things done at night assume an unwonted aspect of excitement; the pheasants, as they drew nearer the wood, kept still rising, and there was no doubt something or somebody disturbing them. Over their heads came the birds, and old Peter put up his stick in the clear moonlight drawing a bead on them, and wishing he had but had his old gun. Oh! how glorious it is to shoot pheasants, or partridges, or grouse, or any fair game! and who could bear to be in this situation, at night even, without wishing and feeling bound to do something? Bang! bang! Bang! bang! Such are the sounds now, and old Peter starts convulsively. "Why," cries he, "there *are* some d——d poacher chaps from town! Polly, lass, I must—'taint no business o'

mine now—but I *must* stop them; stay here, my lass, stay here. I'll finish them devils off in double quick sticks!"

And the old man hurried limping off into the big black cover; while again another bang, bang, bang, showed how strong the enemy were.

Polly stood as if paralyzed. The idea of her old father going to cope with the resolute ruffians whom Mr. Aspland's teaching had encouraged and educated in the town—ah! it was madness, and there, there, the birds still came flying over her, while the moon shone clearly down, and in a little gorge, hard by, the stream of water flowed rippling over the stones.

But for the clear light of the moon she would have sunk down in terror, but it was well nigh like daylight; yet even so there is something terrible to a woman in being left alone, while her father goes to face she

knows not what, of unseen dangers. One, two—she sees figures slipping away at the far corner of the cover.

Polly was not a refined, educated woman; she was not tortured by the sensibilities of a noble soul, yet she was terribly afraid, and she sat down and wept in very anguish of suspense.

Presently—bang, bang, again came sounding on the still midnight air, and she started as if herself shot; the sound, this time, was unutterably awful, and she knew in a dim dense sort of way that something was wrong.

Breathlessly, with heart beating, she stood, waiting—waiting for her father; when would he leave that place where his stupidity had carried him? oh! when would he come back? A man suddenly runs rapidly along the path—is it her father? No! it is—yes, it is young John Wilkinson;

he runs right up to her before he sees her, and then turns fiercely upon her.

"John!"

"Why—what! Polly!"

He seems terribly surprised at first, almost hysterical—mad, indeed; but presently he regains his sense, and says, "What, Polly! why are you here?"

"Oh, John—where is father?" That is the only answer, as they stand together beneath the clear moonlight, his dark, handsome face, and strong frame showing powerfully out as he poses before her, with a gun on his arm.

"Father! why surely he isn't in the wood?"

"'Deed, but he is—and there's poachers on foot; oh, John, dear John, bring him back to me," and Polly began to cry bitterly, and so did not notice John, who was no little moved.

"Now, look here, lass!" cried he, "from all I can hear there's bad business on to-night, and it's not for the likes of you to stay here. Come along with me, and I'll take you home, and then I'll come back and look after father."

Instantly she fired up. "Do you think I would go home without him to-night? I believe you are afraid to go into the wood yourself!"

A deep flush, visible even in the moonlight, covered his face, and he simply said, "No, I am not afraid; but I, unfortunately, have a gun with me, which it would not be well to be found with there to-night. Sooner than that you should think me afraid I will dispense with my gun for ever."

And he soused it far down into a deep pool of the stream close by.

"Maybe, I'll fish it up, some day," said he, "meanwhile, come on."

Then they walked about, and about, in the Black Plantation, where even in the "rides" the briars grew most excruciating, and Polly suffered agonies in her walk. John Wilkinson led her this way and that, and called now and again for her father, alternating his calls with whistling; but no answer came, till one of the under-keepers suddenly turned up, said never a word, and then beckoned them to follow him.

They followed silently. A light shone through the wood, and the trunks of the trees glistened in it. Towards it they went. There were now several figures visible among the trees, and John Wilkinson laid his hand suddenly on Polly's shoulder; she turned and looked at him, and he dropped his head as suddenly.

Now they stepped right into the circle where the light was—but an ordinary lantern, with seven or eight keepers standing

around—and there, where every eye was gazing, two forms stretched out motionless. Polly, with the true courage of a woman, darted right to the dreadful objects, peered into their faces, then fell back, but did not faint. No one faints, as a rule, except in novels. Polly did what nine girls out of ten would have done; she rushed to John, and fell into his arms sobbing, "Oh, it's father and the duke!" John Wilkinson fairly staggered beneath this blow. Polly was right enough in all conscience; but it was reasonable to expect he would be dreadfully agitated by the news.

He left Polly to stand by herself as soon as he could; and then when the detective, who had been summoned, came to him and asked him what he could tell about this unfortunate matter, he made a futile effort to speak—fell forward, and was picked up senseless.

CHAPTER XI.

"And nothing can we call our own but death."
Richard II.

The awful news, almost unexampled in records of crime, was soon circulated broadcast not only over England but the civilized world, for the Duke of Countryholm was known of everywhere.

In such cases those most interested are generally the last to be informed, and it is a fact that Beau, Henry, and Tom, who had been anxiously awaiting at Oxford some explanation of the vague paragraphs which announced a serious poaching affray, found the details of it in later editions of the papers before they had any word from

home. They were all sitting together in Henry's room when they learned the terrible truth, and all at first seemed equally shocked. Beau was the first to recover his composure. "We must go home at once, of course," said he.

"Home?" said Henry—for a moment he felt it impossible to realize that any place could be home now; for he had loved his father very dearly, albeit there was never much outward sign of affection between the duke and his sons.

"Yes, home, of course," replied Beau. "There'll be all sorts of things for me to look after."

"You! Why you?"

"Well, it should be obvious enough to you, seeing that I am the Duke of Countryholm."

"Good God!" cried Henry, "I never thought of that, and I wonder you did."

"There is something for us all to do," said Tom quietly, "though we may not be dukes; and that is to help in finding out the murderers."

"Ah!" said Henry, "that is worth going to the end of the world for."

Very soon they had interviewed the Master, who dismissed them with amiable platitudes, meant for consolation, and in the coldest of cheerless days they took train for Harrington. Very little was said on the journey down; perhaps not very much was even thought. The first shock of a great grief is apt to leave the mind inactive, and the feelings work but slowly. But it was a terrible business reading newspaper after newspaper, and conjuring up that scene in the spot which each one of them knew so well, and where they had shot many a pheasant themselves in past days. The whole thing appeared well-nigh incredible.

They had various fellow-passengers who all talked of the murder in a more or less heartless manner, until they reached a station only a few miles from Harrington, when good old Mr. Lee Fenwick got into the train, not surprised to see them, of course, but very anxious to let them know the worst.

"My poor boys, you have heard the news?" said he.

"Yes, yes; we have read all about it," answered Beau, half impatiently.

"Dear, dear! how soon things get into the papers! I wouldn't have believed it."

"Tell me, Mr. Lee Fenwick," said Henry, "has anything been found out; is any one suspected?"

"Suspicions of all sorts are flying about; but nothing definite has been found—only the hammer of a gun which had been

cracked nearly through, and must have broken off at the fatal shot—it was found on the ground not ten yards from your poor father."

"Ah!" said Tom, "that's something."

"Every one is stunned with grief," continued Mr. Lee Fenwick. "John Wilkinson, the younger, is laid up, they say, with brain fever; he having come suddenly on the awful place last night—it was too much for him!"

"Strange," said Henry, "I never thought any one, much less John, would go seriously wrong over a mere shock!"

"No," continued the Vicar, "nor should I have thought so; but the poor fellow is very bad all the same."

"What was he doing there?" asked Beau.

"Well, I don't quite know; but he was with Polly Stobbs."

"Oh, I see," said Beau significantly, and half smiling.

"Even that man, Aspland," resumed the Vicar, "seems cut up by this business; it is the first time I ever saw him show any feeling, though my wife has always spoken well of him."

And now the train had arrived at Harrington, and very sadly they recognized the familiar faces of the station-master and the porters. Not a man there but wanted to say a word to the boys; but the occasion was one that almost kills words, and even the footman, his eyes swollen with crying, could only sob instead of speaking.

The coachman, who had been in the duke's service twenty years, was seated stolidly on his box—not a trace of emotion on his countenance, only his mind seemed far away, and he took not the slightest

notice of Beau, Henry, and Tom, as they walked up to the carriage.

Beau passed by him half indignant at this. "Old Jones has been drinking, I suppose," he muttered.

To Henry, the sight of a face which he had known from childhood was strangely welcome at that sad time, and he walked up to the coachman and shook him by the hand. "This is a sad business, Jones."

The man looked half vacantly at him, and then the big tears welled up in his eyes.

"God bless you, my lord; I couldn't feel nothing, till you spoke to me."

What a drive home that was in the snow and sleet, with the wind howling piteously past them, and seeming to tell all the evil that had befallen the dear old place! It is true that we are all common clay, but it is equally true that the man who plays a

great part on the earth, leaves a great void when he dies; and here, at any rate, the Duke of Countryholm had been looked up to by all alike, here he had won esteem and earned affection—he was gone, and the country seemed waste and desolate, and the winter storm sounded a mournful dirge.

And now into the dear old castle where all seems gloomy and in disorder.

Miss D'Aguilar, Dorothy, and Mary are there, all bearing evident signs of the awful grief, and there are doctors, and others of the people whom death brings on the scene.

"You will go and see him?" said Miss D'Aguilar gently; and she led them upstairs, pointed to the duke's room, and stood still.

They hesitated; it needed no common firmness to enter that room; but Beau

soon recovered confidence, opened the door, and walked in, followed by Henry and Tom. The first shock, and it was no longer terrible; there lay the duke, calmly as if in sleep, no trace of pain on his features; and this was death!

One by one they stooped and reverently kissed his forehead—Henry last. Beau and Tom left the room at once, but Henry remained. The cold touch of that marble brow brought all his sensibilities into action, and, bursting into tears, he fell on his knees by the bedside.

Who would venture to pry into the mysteries of his prayer; it was very earnest, and one calculated to never die from his memory. How could it? but he ended thus: "And may I remember, as long as I remember my father lying here, to do always with my whole might whatever lies before me to do!"

The sequence between the death and such a request is obscure enough, but that matters not. As Henry rose to his feet, a hand was laid on his shoulder; he started, and then saw Dorothy standing by him.

"You here, Dorothy?" he whispered.

"Yes, Henry, I thought I should like to come; Mary and Miss D'Aguilar were afraid; but—there's nothing to be afraid of; is there?"

"No, dear, nothing; death is very beautiful, I think; but, oh, if I could catch those villains who—"

"Hush, Henry, dear; don't talk that way here—not here!"

And their hands met, and remained locked together, while they still stood by the side of the dead man.

Ah! who can account for the workings of the heart; who can believe that a death-chamber can be the birth-place of love?

Yet it was so; not knowing why or how, her head sank on Henry's breast, and he kissed her tenderly. "God bless you, darling Dorothy!"

And so they went quietly away.

CHAPTER XII.

"'Ελπίδες ἐν ζώοισιν, ἀνέλπιστοι δὲ θανόντες."—*Anon.*

The inquest was over, and the jury had found their verdict of "Wilful Murder against some person or persons unknown." The nine days' wonder and sorrow were in full play, and the day had arrived when the Duke of Countryholm and Peter Stobbs were to be buried. It was indeed an imposing ceremony, for the whole country side seemed to be there, not to mention very many of the principal statesmen of the day. The wealth of flowers that covered the coffins was marvellous, and the Queen herself had not forgotten old Peter, for she had sent a floral offering for him as

well as for his better-known companion in death.

Among those who stood near the vault and the humbler grave were Mr. Disraeli and the late Lord Derby. The duke had never been very friendly with the former, though to the latter he had been warmly attached; but Disraeli was on that solemn occasion very deeply moved, and those who saw him have ever since well understood how his proverbially emotionless habit was a matter of will, and not of nature.

There, too, was Aspland, very calm and serious, and Mrs. Lee Fenwick was near him, while her husband read the service. She was deeply affected — or perhaps "deeply" is not the word; let us rather say she was visibly affected. Indeed, there was scarcely a dry eye in that vast concourse, for not only was the duke a man held in general regard, but any one who

has been at a funeral must know that the beauty of the service itself is enough to draw tears on behalf of even a stranger.

It was all over now, and in various ways the people dispersed, Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli choosing to stroll quietly to the castle, instead of driving. They had not very much to say to one another, these two. Some there are indeed who tell us that Lord Derby was never very fond of his brilliant lieutenant, whom he regarded as a necessity rather than an acquisition. Nay, it was about that time that the *Press*, of which Disraeli had the control, appeared inclined to exalt him at the expense of Lord Derby.

But a walk in the clear frosty air soon drives away thoughts like these, and the earl presently said,—

"Well, we've seen the last of Countryholm, poor fellow! It's enough to make

one sick of trying to do anything for the people; when I think of his death, and the idea of a reform bill to enfranchise his murderers, probably, I feel inclined to retire into private life."

"And, yet," said Disraeli, quietly, "people are better employed in voting than in committing murder."

"You don't mean to say you would give them votes through *fear* of them?"

"No, that is a Liberal principle; but you must give their educated energies vent all the same."

"Or else there'll be a blow up, I suppose you'll say," added Lord Derby. "Well, for my part, I feel this matter of reform to be simply a case of 'needs must when the devil drives,' and I suppose we must go through with it."

"I do not think," said Disraeli, "this crime can have been a political one: had

the duke been a bad landlord like Lord A——, or a dangerous political adventurer like myself" (he smiled sarcastically), "there might have been some cause to suspect—but, in any case, I am convinced that the people of this country will be with us against the Whigs, if we will only make common cause with them."

"You believe it possible to unite the lowest with the highest?"

"Most firmly I do; all men look naturally for leaders—even you and I do sometimes." Lord Derby laughed, for he well remembered the 1852, when with his ministry of tyros, otherwise known as the "Who, Who?" ministry, he would very gladly have found some experienced guidance. "More than that," continued Disraeli, "I believe that if the leaders are worthy, and act strongly, the Tory party may be the national one. Conservatism

has retarded us sadly—we are but at the foot of the ladder yet."

Lord Derby looked hardly well pleased, and they went on silently to the castle.

As the two statesmen entered the castle they came upon Henry, who went with them quietly and sadly into the morning room, where were many others; mourners in semblance, if not reality. Beau was, of course, the main object of notice, and Mr. Disraeli was among the first to speak to him some well-turned phrase of sympathy. But amid all the sorrow Beau was gathering rapidly the sense of his own importance, and he thought it well to be a little haughty to the man whose inherited importance was insignificant.

"I think, Mr. Disraeli," said he, "that condolence is of little use."

"Perhaps so, but why do you think it?"

"Well, unless we are selfish brutes, we

ought to derive nothing akin to pleasure—rather the reverse—from the fact that others grieve as well as we, and, on the other hand, when the others only make believe that they grieve—it is surely contemptible."

"True, very true, in a sense," said Mr. Disraeli, as if not noticing the clumsy sarcasm. "You will be a philosopher some day,—make the House of Lords a palace of truth."

"Much need for that," muttered Beau. Disraeli eyed him a little keenly—"You will join the Carlton when this trouble is past?"

"I don't think so," said Beau.

"Not a very safe Duke that," thought Disraeli to himself, as he walked away; still he *is* a Duke, and that is pretty sure to steady him, politically at any rate."

And now he came upon Henry, who was sitting alone in a corner. A timely word

to him, too, was spoken, and Henry looked up gratefully, almost with tears in his eyes.

"I don't know, Mr. Disraeli, why it is, but I think such a lot of just those little words from you."

"Do you, indeed? I wish I could speak more of them. And now, tell me what are you going to do in the future?"

"I hardly know; I have strange fancies sometimes of doing good work. You won't mind my saying some of your books touch just the chord I want to strike for myself. Oh, Mr. Disraeli, 'Sybil' is a glorious book!"

And Henry half blushed, for he feared his sudden outburst of praise might be mistaken for wilful flattery.

Disraeli was not always immovable, and now something like a flush of pleasure spread over his face. He shook Henry by the hand, and said, "I am glad to hear you say that, for I know you mean it: I

hope I shall hear from you sometimes; I want the help of such as you."

And so he went, leaving Henry bewildered indeed at the thought of his being wanted by such a man.

. . . . . .

Across the park towards the old vicarage were walking Mrs. Lee Fenwick and Mr. Aspland. The old Vicar had ridden home in advance, and this strange couple passed moodily along, talking now and again on the event of the day.

"Sad!" said Aspland; "of course, it was sad, in a sense; but the folly of it takes away the sadness. Why should we think more of the duke's burial than that of Peter Stobbs? In the grave surely they are equal!"

"That may be so; but surely regret for a great man may well make us do double honour at his grave?"

"Great man, indeed! He was no great man. Had he been a plain coal-heaver he would never have risen, and might have died more honourably."

"Honourably?"

"Ay; for was he not a victim to the accursed plague of landlordism and game laws?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Lee Fenwick, "but I believe he was a good man."

Aspland laughed coarsely. "Good man, indeed! Ah! well, we must make his heir a better; and I shall want your help there."

"Mine! How?"

"Oh, he's a young fool, and you could do anything with him."

"I don't understand."

"Pshaw! what's the use of affecting innocent ignorance? I tell you you can, if you like, do what you like with the

new duke, and you'd best do it. I want a live duke broken free from Church and State and all such rubbish, and with him as an example I can convince any one."

So they passed on towards the vicarage, where all seemed outwardly to speak of innocence, and where the good old Vicar was awaiting his wife. How, if we could but see through this atmosphere of earth, should we see now the spirits of evil hovering overhead, and rejoicing in the doom which gathers slowly but surely—for whom?

CHAPTER XIII.

"In many ways doth the full heart reveal
The presence of the love it would conceal."
Coleridge.

TIME passed on, and no trace of the murderers of the duke and old Peter Stobbs was discovered. One solitary indication remained, and that was the hammer of a gun which had snapped off, and was found lying near the dead men. This was carefully kept, as may be well imagined, and very sharply were guns in and about Harrington scrutinized, but to no purpose.

And now, like everything else in the world, the event which had caused so

much horror, began to fade into forgetful past, and was spoken of, if at all, without emotion. The boys had gone back to Oxford—Beau with a vastly-increased sense of importance; and with the advent of the summer term there came a long thought of the visit of Miss D'Aguilar, Dorothy, and Lady Mary, accompanied, strange to say, by Mrs. Lee Fenwick, who had quite wound herself into the affections of the womankind of the family since the duke's death.

She had so long wanted to see Oxford, she said, and she talked so of the pleasure it would give her to go, that her good old husband was overjoyed when the chance was thrown in her way, and regretted only that he couldn't go himself in order to revisit the scenes of his earlier days.

Mrs. Lee Fenwick was not yet thirty, and she had rather improved in appearance

with age. Indeed she was within measureable distance of being beautiful; but of late she had been wonderfully quiet and discreet. As to Aspland, the world knew little of her relations towards him, and he seemed almost to have dropped out of sight and mind now.

Be that as it may, she had contrived to become very indispensable at the castle. She formed, as it were, a connecting link between Miss D'Aguilar and the girls. She could be a staid matron with the former and a merry companion with the latter. It followed almost as a matter of course that she went to Oxford when the rest did.

We now draw near to a momentous time, as the various persons whom fate has ordained to influence one another for good or bad are approaching. To us who can take a bird's-eye view it is all plain

enough, but to the actors in the drama, each seeing only within a limited sphere, the prospect is vague and indefinite.

Meeting the ladies at the station was of course a great business—ladies always are so welcome at Oxford, or anywhere where they are not accustomed to be seen; and then, of course, the drive to the Randolph in such vehicles as Oxford affords, much rattling preventing talk. From the Randolph to lunch in college—such a lunch, too! It was set out in Beau's rooms with all the magnificence which ducal splendour could impart to the humble kitchen and buttery of Dervorguilla. William, the scout, fairly chuckled to himself at the bare idea of the subsequent perquisites which would accrue to him.

Of course everything was badly arranged. It always is when men have to depend solely on themselves. "Heavens, look at

those flowers!" cried Mary. "What are they? roses and dahlias mixed? Really, Beau, you have no taste!"

Beau acknowledged that he didn't understand flowers. "I just put them together as they came," said he.

"Well, but we can soon alter that," said Mrs. Lee Fenwick. Come, Beau, give me the flowers, and I'll arrange them."

Beau willingly yielded obedience, while she took the flowers one by one from him as he stood by her side, and soon began to evolve order out of chaos.

The youthful duke was at an age—barely twenty—when the attraction of a matured and beautiful woman is very irresistible; and now every touch of her hand—and she contrived to touch his very often in her work—made his heart beat strangely. "There," she said, finishing, "don't they look pretty now?"

"They do," said he; "both you and the flowers."

"Well, I'm sure! How dare you talk like that to me, an old, married woman?"

"Old! I wouldn't like you a day younger. Married! Ah, yes, you are married—unfortunately."

"Fortunately, I should say; otherwise I should be frightened to death of you."

Beau laughed, in a self-satisfied fashion. It was intensely pleasing to him to find this charming woman disposed to take him at his own valuation. So their edifying conversation ran on, little noticed by the others, for Tom and Mary were talking sixteen to the dozen about the horses, the dogs, the college eights, the 'varsity eleven, and so forth. By-the-way, Tom was playing in the eleven—a great honour for a comparative freshman.

Henry and Dorothy were more or less

silent. Strangely enough, since that extraordinary spontaneous outburst, when they had pretty nearly told their love in the chamber of death, they had never reverted to the subject. The thing had been so sudden, so unpremeditated, and upon reflection so inexplicable, that each felt shy of the other, and nothing but awkward commonplaces were now exchanged. Who does not know what a relief it is to escape sometimes from the presence of another, whom not even love can, in a sense, make welcome, so torturing is the strained artificiality which we dare not cast off, for some absurd reason or another?

Lunch progressed merrily very soon, and even Miss D'Aguilar grew lively. "Will the Master call on us?" asked she.

"Sure to," said Henry.

"A most eligible old gentleman, aunt,' added Tom.

"Tom, how can you talk such nonsense?"

"Nonsense? It's sense, excellent sense; as you'll very likely find."

After lunch came the inevitable inspection of the college, and a stroll through Christ Church meadows to the river.

"Are *all* the boys—or rather men—boating men?" asked Mary.

"No," said Tom. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, they are all got up in flannels."

"Oh, yes, they all do that."

"But why?"

"I really don't know."

"Then you must be stupid. I'll go and ask Beau. Beau, why do all these creatures dress themselves as if for boating?"

"Why shouldn't they, if they like it?"

"Henry, can you tell me the reason?"

"What? Why these fellows wear

flannels? Why they couldn't tell you themselves!"

"Then they must be idiots."

"Precisely so."

Mary gave it up in despair

And now from the palatial summit of the Dervorguilla barge they had surveyed the river, swarming with varied craft, had marked with amusement the labouring crews of the countless boats which assiduous persons were conscientiously and patiently coaching. Raw freshmen toiling in tubs, incapable of taking advice, clumsy-handed, and with not a vestige of smartness in the recovery—"Sharply over the stretcher, bow,"—"Sharp out with the hands, two,"—Don't feather under water, three,"—"Slowly, forward stroke; don't bucket,"—and so forth. Cries such as these make a regular Babel of the river on a busy afternoon; and it is indeed

wonderful what a lot of arduous exertion is expended with so small an object.

"I wonder," said Dorothy—and she had as yet said very little,—"if all this work couldn't be better employed?"

"Just what Ruskin says," replied Henry. "He says we ought, instead, to beautify the country."

"Rubbish! How on earth would you go about to beautify the country?"

"Well, I hardly know; but I formed one of a noble band who constructed twenty yards of road, at Ruskin's request."

"Was it beautiful?"

"Not particularly, that I could see."

Mrs. Lee Fenwick and Beau had meanwhile left the barge, and were walking away round, along the banks of the Cherwell; she still delighting him with trifles of silly talk, he rapidly losing such head as he possessed; and thus we note

as it were the prologue to a very real drama.

That afternoon the Master called on the ladies at the Randolph. Miss D'Aguilar had driven in advance of the others to order tea, and they were in no hurry to follow her. Thus it came about that the Master met her alone, when following his card he entered the apartment.

Miss D'Aguilar, to speak truth, was not altogether abandoned to spinsterhood, and the observation of Tom, at lunch, had insensibly produced some effect on her; so she smiled very sweetly on the Master, and welcomed him most heartily, telling him that she had heard so much of him from her dear nephews that she felt as if he were an old friend.

The Master bowed, not ill-pleased, for Miss D'Aguilar was a by no means bad-looking woman, though of a certain age;

besides, her connections and her money were unimpeachable.

"I am very glad to have found you in, Miss D'Aguilar," said he; "I shall see the young people another time, I hope."

"Oh, doubtless; they will be here, presently; which reminds me I must ring for the tea. I suppose, though, the conversation of young people does not interest you, Doctor?"

"Not much, I confess. Indeed, I seldom meet ladies, young or old; but, at the same time, I think there is nothing more charming than to converse with a really sensible woman."

Miss D'Aguilar started a little and glanced at him, but he had lapsed into his habit of looking at nothing.

"But whom would you call a sensible woman?"

"Well, let me see. I should call you

one if you could understand a syllogism; could you?"

"I don't know, but I will try; and Miss D'Aguilar flushed a little.

"Well, take for instance the major and minor premiss,—

'All good men are lovable.
I am a good man.'

What conclusion would you arrive at from that?"

"That you are lovable," said Miss D'Aguilar, blushing beyond doubt this time.

"Precisely. Plato himself could not have reasoned more rapidly; but to continue in another way: 'All lovable men are good.'"

"But are you sure of that?" asked Miss D'Aguilar.

"My dear madam, can you doubt it? Well, we go on with: 'I am lovable.'"

"Yes," sighed Miss D'Aguilar, though whether from weariness or some other cause did not appear.

"Therefore?"—

"You are good."

"Exactly. I have never met so logical a lady, nor has it ever fallen to my lot to be so agreeably proved both lovable and good."

Miss D'Aguilar smiled faintly. Did he really mean to propose? She looked at him, but his eyes were again fixed on nothing. Presently he went on:—

"All love for a good man is good?"

"No doubt."

"All love for a bad man is bad?"

"Possibly."

"It is therefore not good to love a bad man?"

"I fear so."

"Similarly, it is not bad to love a good one?"

"That is so."

"Well, then, my dear Miss D'Aguilar, you have already shown that I am a good man; therefore—therefore?—eh?"

"Therefore, it is not bad to love you," murmured Miss D'Aguilar, blushing scarlet. She looked round just as she had uttered the words, and to her horror there stood Mary, Dorothy, Tom, and Henry, who had entered unheard, the door not having been properly shut.

Had they heard? They looked as grave as judges, but the poor lady was dreadfully apprehensive. The Master, on the other hand, betrayed not the slightest sign that anything out of the common had happened.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Amare et sapere vix deo conceditur."

Laber

The days sped happily along during that week or two at Oxford. There were rides to Woodstock, and pleasant wandering about Blenheim Park, that most beautiful place which stands worthily as an outward and visible sign of the nation's gratitude to one of its greatest men.

"I often wonder," said Henry, one day, as he and Dorothy were standing on the bridge in the park together, "how people can possibly justify the cry to abolish perpetual pensions."

"Well, they say the pensions were given for unworthy reasons."

"A grave fault that in the givers but so that it was done legally, why should the father's unworthiness be visited on the children?"

"Yes, but it does seem a little hard that people should be taxed to pay people for doing nothing?"

"Not a bit. What difference does it make whether you give me a lump sum of 100,000*l.* or a perpetual pension of 3000*l.* a year? The two things are identical. Besides, how can you reward a man so well as by providing for his children? There may be something against hereditary peerages, but there is positively nothing against hereditary pensions."

"Do you know, Henry," said Dorothy, "I like to hear you talk seriously, be it for ever so short a time. I wish you'd promise me to read more and think more."

"Why, of course I will, if you wish it."

She looked wistfully at him, and then they both became confused, and talked about the herons which were to be seen in numbers.

Dorothy was, without doubt, a very beautiful girl now, and Henry was keenly alive to the fact; yet his casual method of thought kept him always in abeyance, as it were, with regard to her. He would have resented at once any attempt on the part of another to win her affections, yet, beyond that, he let matters drift. Mr. Desanges, who had by this time grown still more enormously wealthy, had been only too glad to leave his daughter where she was so happy, and in such good society; it never occurred to any of the family that Dorothy might some time leave them.

After an awkward pause now she spoke again. "Tell me, Henry, what you intend to do in the future."

"Oh, I don't know."

"You must do something; remember, your income isn't a big one."

"Well, perhaps I'll take to politics."

"Really?"

"Yes, it would be *really*, if I did it at all. I feel a desire, somehow, to stir up the mutton-headed old stupids who sleep and maunder on with their stale Conservatism, thinking that the laws of property exist for their especial behoof. Property, indeed! Property exists but as an encouragement for active industry, and not for sluggards to fatten on. Oh, I do think I could startle them a bit; and then how grand it would be to really go for the people and make them one's friends!"

"But, Henry, you'd be called a Radical."

"I don't care what they call me, I'd be friends with the people—I always have been—and I'd—but what nonsense I'm talking!" and Henry laughed at himself.

"Don't laugh, my boy, but act." These were her simple words, and they were wise ones.

They had ridden down to Blenheim just to see the place, for the family was in town, and of the riding party were, of course Beau and Mrs. Lee Fenwick. Matters had progressed dangerously there, for the young duke was but weak and the lady enchanting.

They, too, were wandering about the grounds, and we may just listen to a trifle of their conversation.

"Ah," says she, "when men are young like you, they always have wild fancies. It would be wrong for me to hear you talk if I didn't know it all meant nothing."

"Meant nothing! Oh, but I mean such a lot! You know I do, you *must* know."

"I know! What should I know?"

"That I—that you are—such a good sort!"

"Well, to be sure! Is that all? I dare say I am. My good vicar often tells me as much."

"Oh, but I mean more—much more. I —don't know what's the matter with me; but I just can't stand it, that's all."

"Nonsense! you a duke, and talking in this silly way! Come along, and sit down here under this tree and apologize."

So they sat down in as lovely a scene as one may wish to look upon. The warmth of the summer day and the glory of summer verdure, with the song of birds and the peace that reigned around rendered the place a little too romantic.

But Beau was very young, and he sat there with his heart in his mouth, as it were; while she, with all the witchery of accomplished loveliness, held the victim in play. Once only he looked startled, and that was when he had, in sentimental

fashion, spoken of the Creator of the beautiful country around them.

"My dear Beau," said she, "surely you don't believe in all that sort of thing."

He didn't in fact. Schoolmasters and dons had so far prevailed with him; but somehow it seemed unnatural and horrid to hear a woman suggesting it, and he didn't like it. She saw her mistake in an instant. "I mean, you don't believe the Creator studies beauty rather than effect?"

"Oh, I don't know; but He must have studied both in you."

It so chanced now that their hands touched, and that touch was alone enough to affect the youth alarmingly. He blushed and gasped; and he timidly and stealthily —as if by accident—took hold of the hand which was not withdrawn. This was delirium—there was no drawing back now; he waxed bold, drew her suddenly

towards him, and would have kissed her madly as is the habit of youth, when she started up.

"Good heavens! Beau, you forget, yourself. What do you mean by such conduct!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry," stammered he; "I didn't mean to, and—oh, I must be mad!"

So they walked off to find the others. She inwardly amused; and he cursing himself and his fate for his ill-judged and unrequited affection.

So things went on till the time came for the ladies to leave Oxford. Miss D'Aguilar had met the Master more than once, and ratiocinated with him. The young people laughed at her, but the Master began to look a little less into space than usual when she was there. Beau was the victim of sleepless nights; Henry to some extent

the cherisher of vague ambitions; Tom the honest receptacle of common-sense, sport, and a trifle of love. It was as well the ladies went when they did, they would have caused dreadful havoc had they remained.

Youth is very recuperative, and Beau very soon pulled himself together sufficiently to make an effort of some sort.

"I'll run a horse at Ascot!" cried he.

"So soon," said Henry.

"Oh, why not? The governor entered his two-year-olds in my name, so he wouldn't mind."

CHAPTER XV.

"Friendship! mysterious cement of the soul!
Sweetness of life! and solder of society!"
Robert Blair.

DOROTHY DESANGES took to moping somewhat at the castle, or so, at least, Mary said. "One would say you were in love," she added, "but that's absurd."

"Of course, dear; what should put such a fancy into your head?"

"Don't know, I'm sure; spirits, I suppose."

"Why spirits?"

"Because certainly no man in the flesh has up to now penetrated my head or heart either."

And Mary went laughing off with her two dogs on to the lawn, while Dorothy sighed a little, and looked out among the old trees into the park.

"Love! of course not," she said to herself. "I can't be so silly as that, surely; but how I wish I could help Henry; make him work; drive him into doing his best, and see him placed as high as he should be! Ah! how am I to do it? How do I know he has it in him? How do I know? Well, I *do* know; that's all."

So she sat, half-musing, half-talking, in the big drawing-room, with one of the windows open on to the lawn where the merry Lady Mary was playing all sorts of games with her dogs, in the sweet summer unshine; and everything seemed to speak of light-heartedness, except to Dorothy, who was just a little sorrowful.

She was old enough to think now, and

could not but realize her position, which was a little curious. Her father wrote to her at times, and she had seen him about once a year, not counting a month or so in the States, when she had been with him, but she was to all intents and purposes an orphan, though she had never understood it till she began to feel that one whom she had thought her brother was both more and less than a brother.

There was positively not a soul in the big house to whom she could talk of Henry as he ought to be talked of. Perhaps the old housekeeper came nearest the mark when she said,—

"Lord bless you, Miss Dorothy, but Lord Henry will make a man one might be proud to house-keep for, and yet one would know such things wasn't of much consequence to him."

"How do you mean, Mrs. Dickson?"

"Oh, I don't know, but somehow I think eating and drinking and living isn't enough for him."

Dorothy didn't answer, but she thanked the speaker with a look, if looks can reward, and putting on the first hat she came across, went off for a stroll on the far side of the house and through the woods towards Newton. It was about three in the afternoon, and the weather glorious, the very heyday of summer-time and verdure. She was herself as fair a picture as any in nature, and he would have been a churl indeed who could refuse homage to her bright beauty, as she sauntered slowly forward amid the trees with an old straw hat and the airiest suggestion of hot weather drapery.

How can you disclose a girl's heart? Not easily. Maybe, there was a good deal of the trivial in her thoughts. Certainly

there was a great deal of the high-flown. We think things that we should hardly speak even to ourselves, and if she credited herself with the possible power of converting what others thought an ordinary youth into a prime minister, or some such great one—well, who shall blame her? She was a modest maiden, fancy free at that moment, and should be free, perhaps, from our unmannerly intrusion.

Walking at first with no distinct object, she presently found herself nearing the cottage where poor old Peter Stobbs used to live, and where now Polly and her old mother alone remained. Very often did the ladies from the castle come hitherward, for the old woman was garrulous, and retentive of gossip, and such old women are not without a charm, albeit in the humblest station.

So Dorothy went on to the cottage,

and found Mrs. Stobbs knitting at her door.

"Good day, Mrs. Stobbs."

"Good day to you, Miss Dorothy; and aren't you going to see the feast?"

"Feast! Why, Mrs. Stobbs, it would hardly do for me to go, would it?"

"Why, no; perhaps not, miss; unless, say, you was to go to John Wilkinson's house?"

"What would be the good of that? Oh, I mustn't go."

"You know, miss, you'd see from there into the village, and all that's going on, and—I wish you'd go just to take Polly along with you, poor lass; for she hasn't been near Wilkinson's since—since that night, and daren't go by herself."

It ended in Dorothy setting off on this madcap adventure, to view the Newton Feast, accompanied by Polly Stobbs,

looking very pretty—all the more so because she was in mourning, and not gorgeously attired.

They had to walk in that very direction which Polly and her father had come on that fatal night, and the trial was no small one to the poor girl who remembered so well the whole scene.

"It was here, Miss Dorothy, that he went into the wood, and there where I met John Wilkinson. If I hadn't a' met him, I do believe I'd a' died!"

"Is it true you are engaged to John?" asked Dorothy, wishing to brighten the subject.

"Engaged! Well, miss, I don't know as to that, and John hasn't been quite the same, like, of late; but it isn't for the likes of me to talk about being engaged."

"Why, Polly?"

"We only keep company."

"A sweet expression, too, Polly, if the company you keep is with one, and for life."

"There's Charles Wilkinson a-standing there at the door," said Polly, as they neared the old farm-house, with its trim array of buildings behind it, and here, there, and everywhere an expanse of golden corn.

"Charles! And I was told Charles was very fond of you, Polly!"

Polly flushed a little at this. "Oh, he's only a lout!"

Dorothy turned to her in some haste. "A what?"

"A—that is, leastwise he's not so genteel-like as John."

"For goodness' sake don't talk about people being genteel! The very expression convinces me that Charles Wilkinson is worth a dozen of his brother."

Polly said nothing. She was a little put out by this, but hardly dared to say so.

Charles had meanwhile received them with many blushes, and very clumsily; and the father and mother rushed to welcome the visitors as soon as they heard of their advent. "God bless you, my lady," said the good old man—he always called ladies from the castle "my lady," "it does one's heart good to see you again here; it does, indeed, after all one's heard of big folks and little not being fit company."

"Big folks and little, Mr. Wilkinson! Why, in that case, it is I that should be glad, for you are a great deal bigger than I am."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the farmer. "Now, that's what I call good; me bigger than you! D'ye hear that, missis?

Why, my lady, you wouldn't judge worth by inches ?"

"No, Mr. Wilkinson; but I count us all alike, and wish we might all be friends."

"That's it, that's it; friends! By jingo! but you'd make rare duchess here! At least, I beg pardon, my lady, a thousand times; I forgot what I was saying."

Dorothy laughed the awkward outburst off; and then went with her honest host and hostess into a room from which the Newton Feast could be surveyed, having first, as a *sine quâ non*, been obliged to taste the cake and other good cheer provided for the day.

What a sight is a village fair! Something utterly uninteresting one might think, but not so think the villagers. Whether you be the child yearning for

bull's-eyes from the tented stall, or the yokel purchasing gauds from some other department for his fair ladye, or the more educated swain discharging the vacillating rifle down the shooting-gallery, or the dashing hero staking his pence on something akin to roulette; or whether you seek in more advancing years the refined pleasures of the menagerie, or, in still further pursuit of science, the glorious rotundity of the fat woman, or whether you crown your age with a view of the sphinx's head and other marvels of black art—it matters not; you will have passed through the seven ages of village feasters, if you do all these things, and peradventure afterwards you will trip it fantastically on the hob-nailed toe in the barn of mine host of—say the Fauconberg Arms.

Dorothy was a good deal amused by all she saw, and Polly had gone down

to share in the festivities, accompanied by Charles.

"Where is John to-day, Mrs. Wilkinson?" asked Polly.

"Why, he'll be here any minute; but he's been to Harrington. I doubt, Miss Dorothy, he's never been the same since —that night. I never thought he'd come round, and now he spends half his time at Harrington, listening to lectures and such like. I feel fit to break my heart over him."

"Drat him!" interpolated old Wilkinson, "and now he says bad farmin' is all due to primogeniture and entail, as if that made any difference! Aren't I farming here and better farming, and what's there to stop me but the foreigners?"

"You have had a really good landlord, Mr. Wilkinson," said Dorothy. "Perhaps

it would be different if you had a bad one."

At this moment there was a sudden disturbance in the village below. Two men were struggling and fighting together, while a girl stood by apparently in an agony of alarm. "Oh!" screamed Mrs. Wilkinson. "Oh! It's our John and Charles, and they're a-fighting over that there Stobbs' girl—oh, that ever I should live to see the day!"

Old John Wilkinson no sooner understood what was going on than he rushed out of the house away down the road to separate the combatants. Mrs. Wilkinson wrung her hands hopelessly, and Dorothy looked on in some alarm. It is a serious thing to see two brothers fight; but fortunately, little harm is, as a rule, done by the unskilled. Anyhow, beyond bleeding noses, nothing was much amiss when the father came breathless on the

scene and parted them with a torrent of indignation. What was it all about? Why, just what the mother thought; and Polly with some little sense declared she would leave the pair of them and go home, which she and Dorothy accordingly did, the pugnacious lovers being left sheepish, sore and lamenting.

After parting from Polly, who went off to her cottage home, Dorothy came, much to her surprise, upon the colossal figure of Mr. Aspland, whom she knew slightly through Mrs. Lee Fenwick. He had been walking round the park, he said—would Miss Desanges mind his going with her a short way as he was going to the North gates? Of course, she couldn't well mind, so they walked on, at first silently; presently he remarked, "It is a sad thing to see such a beautiful place belonging to any one who doesn't live in it?"

"Doesn't live in it, Mr. Aspland?

Why, the Duke will live in it regularly, when he leaves Oxford?"

"Ah, yes, perhaps, perhaps; you are a very clever young lady; and I dare say would tell me land is quite as productive when one man has got the most he can out of it during his life, and another has forestalled all that he is going to get?"

"I don't quite understand you, Mr. Aspland; you had better talk to the Duke when he comes home."

"Upon my word that's very sensible of you; most ladies insist they know everything; while you have the courage to confess ignorance. A sort of agnostic, in fact."

"Mr. Aspland, you had better not say another word to me there; I am not ashamed to say I am ignorant of many things; but I trust I know my God as I know myself!"

She looked full at him, with just a tinge

of colour in her face, and the man seemed absolutely confused for a moment.

"I am sorry you took my words amiss," he said, presently. "Perhaps, some day I shall convince you, or another will for me," and with a forbidding smile he raised his hat, and left Dorothy to return home, just in time to dress for dinner.

END OF VOL. I.

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